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A
COMPANION
FOR
THE SICK CHAMBER:
OR,
The Uses of Affliction
BRIEFLY STATED AND ILLUSTRATED,
WITH
EXAMPLES AND PRAYERS.
BY
JOHN THORNTON.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.—*First Use of Affliction.*

To excite a serious and most earnest concern about the salvation of the soul in those who have been totally negligent, p. 1.

CHAPTER II.—*Second Use of Affliction.*

To produce a deep-fixed attention to the concerns of the soul in those who have been sometimes seriously impressed, but have soon had their impressions worn away, p. 12.

CHAPTER III.—*Third Use of Affliction.*

To lead us to Christ, the Light and Life of men, the Rock and Refuge of the Church, our only Mediator and Redeemer, p. 24.

CHAPTER IV.—*Fourth Use of Affliction.*

To convince us that we stand in need of the power, guidance, and grace of the Holy Spirit, and that the precious gift must be sought by urgent and unwearied prayer, p. 36.

CHAPTER V.—*Fifth Use of Affliction.*

To show us, in a touching and impressive manner, the utter emptiness, vanity, and barrenness of the present world, and the folly and misery of seeking our portion in it, p. 48.

CHAPTER VI.—*Sixth Use of Affliction.*

To humble, subdue, and soften our proud, stubborn hearts, and lay us prostrate and penitent before the Divine mercy-seat, p. 61.

CHAPTER VII.—*Seventh Use of Affliction.*

To exercise faith, filial freedom, and hallowed fervour, in those acts of private devotion which form an essential part of Christian discipline, and furnish a rich store of Christian consolation, p. 76.

CHAPTER VIII.—*Eighth Use of Affliction.*

To teach us the importance and value of those public means of grace and ordinances of religion, which in the days of health and ease we are so apt to neglect, or attend with coldness and formality, p. 92.

CHAPTER IX.—*Ninth Use of Affliction.*

To move us at once to make a solemn surrender and dedication of ourselves and all we have to God, without any reserve or delay, p. 106.

CHAPTER X.—*Tenth Use of Affliction.*

To allay the fretfulness and irritation of corroding care, and dispose us to form habits of patience and resignation to the Divine will, p. 124.

CHAPTER XI.—*Eleventh Use of Affliction.*

To enable us, when restored, if such be the will of God, to enter with more feeling and tenderness into the sufferings of our brethren, and prepare us to make sacrifices to serve them, p. 142.

CHAPTER XII.—*Twelfth Use of Affliction.*

To weaken our attachment to inferior objects and pursuits, and to familiarize our thoughts to the fall and dissolution of our clay tabernacles, p. 155.

CHAPTER XIII.—*Thirteenth Use of Affliction.*

To refine and sanctify us for the inheritance of the saints in light, and to render more and more sweet and cheering the promise and the prospect of that heavenly kingdom, where sickness and sorrow, the bitter fruit, and sin, their baneful root—where fear and vexation, danger and temptation, are known and felt no more, p. 171.

P R E F A C E.

IT is of great importance to improve the painful visitations of Providence, both to our own benefit and that of others. I know that some condemn altogether the practice of introducing religion into the sick room, whether it be by discourse or by books; and that others, in the opposite extreme, welcome the whole train of Christian connexions in a manner which scarcely admits to the patient an hour of quietude. Both classes are blamable; and the latter, in particular, will find few to excuse them. As to the former, a moment's attention is required to meet the objection raised by them.

Why do you bring a religious book into the chamber of affliction? Is it a time to

think on the most deep and difficult of all subjects when there is hardly power to think at all? Is not the attempt as absurd as it would be to expect to raise a palace by building upon the waves, or a harvest by sowing to the winds? To this I reply, the language of violence is seldom just. The objection itself might be admitted, as regards the *crisis* of many *diseases*. But they often slowly come, and slowly depart, and leave a degree of weakness in the body, while the mind has the free and vigorous use of every faculty. Now, in the first stages of some complaints, and after the worst symptoms of others are removed, a serious book may prove a valuable means of aiding reflection.

The writer of the following pages had lately to pass through a severe and dangerous illness, in which neither his friends nor his medical attendants for some weeks entertained much hope of his life and recovered health; yet being mercifully raised

again, he feels anxious to speak a word of warning or of encouragement to those who are under the chastening hand of God. In the depths of his own affliction, and under the outspread shadow of death, he had none of the rapturous joys of religion, yet was never deprived of its supports and hopes. After the body had somewhat recruited its wasted strength, (if the first person may be assumed instead of the third,) I began to consider how I might improve the trial. Suffice it to say, I drew the main outline of the following chapters for my own private use. Generally I lay awake four or five hours every night, extremely feeble, but free from pain, and O! what sweet and delightful hours they were! Never before did I find such calmness and command of thought in meditation on sacred subjects, such liberty and ardour in prayer, such deadness to the things of the world, and such longing desires after God, and holiness, and heaven!

O how often since have I wished that the glow of gratitude which warmed my heart at that time might continue undamped and even increasing to the end of my life. Bishop Hall mentions a Christian of his acquaintance, who, being heavily afflicted with the strangury, in the midst of his torments broke out into the following language:—"O my Lord God, how gracious hast thou been to me! thou hast given me eight-and-forty years of health, and now but two years of pain! Blessed be thy name for thy mercy in forbearing me, and for thy justice in afflicting me." My own case, except in the length of the suffering, somewhat resembled the one above stated; and the wish to profit my fellow-men and brethren prompted me to compose this little manual, with the hope of leading some of the sons and daughters of sorrow to the springs of consolation which have refreshed my own soul. Even where there is a root of genuine piety in the heart it is

often almost choked with noxious weeds, which require to be plucked up and consumed; and every one who has found the benefit of affliction like the man who has proved the efficacy of a remedy, is, and should be, anxious to extend the use of it to others. Sometimes a word may be spoken, *virâ voce*, to a friend in sickness or convalescence, when a book would excite instant disgust; at other times, the loan or gift of a suitable book may prove acceptable when no opportunity is afforded of personal address.

Let us remember that the great business of our life is to be prepared for death and eternity! We are all naturally disposed to feel in earnest about the things of little moment, and indifferent concerning those which demand our fixed and most intense regard, because they are of incalculable and everlasting importance. If there be a bustling forwardness and ill-directed zeal in some professing Christians, there is in

others a false delicacy and a shrinking timidity. The chief danger lies in a cold indifference and a careless negligence. Be not content to float smoothly down the stream of time, unmindful of the bottomless ocean, the boundless eternity towards which you are hastening. A few more rapid hours will close your earthly race ; a few more transient pains and pleasures will finish your present probationary state. Think, then, of the solemn moment of separation from all things here below ! Think of the awful and grand realities of that world of spirits which is before you, and into which you must so speedily enter ! Think of the Redeemer's rousing call, " Be ye also ready." And when you feel the bonds of nature dissolve, may your soul wing its joyful flight into the blessed regions of immortal day !

February 20th, 1835.

A COMPANION TO THE SICK CHAMBER.

CHAPTER I.

First Use of Affliction.

To excite a serious and most earnest concern about the salvation of the soul in those who have been totally negligent.

Amidst unbroken health and unclouded prosperity, all men are too apt to forget God and their own best interests. The stormy day of affliction is calculated to shake off their slumber, and call forth the cry, “Where is God my Maker?” or “What shall I do to be saved?” To fallen, guilty creatures, such as we are, no other inquiries will bear a comparison with these in point of importance. God leads us into the valley of *Achor*, which means *trouble*, to give us a door of hope. Hosea ii. 15. Not that sickness, or sorrow in

any other form, is necessarily blessed to those who are the subjects of it; alas! the contrary is too evident, but I am speaking of the merciful design of the Almighty. He doth not afflict willingly, “nor grieve the children of men;” he has wise and gracious ends to answer, in reference both to our welfare and his own glory. You who long enjoyed good health and high spirits are now laid on the bed of languishing. For what purpose, think you, is this sharp dispensation of Providence sent? Surely it is to reclaim your wandering soul, and to deliver it from the pit of perdition, by faith in the precious ransom which the gospel reveals. He who came to call, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance, having made atonement by the blood of his cross, now sits at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, and saith, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and besides me there is no Saviour.” Oh, that you may look to Calvary and behold the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world! At the foot of the cross, the heart

dissolves, and sin is hated, because there it appears infinitely hateful. We look, as the prophet speaks, on Him whom we have pierced, and mourn in bitterness, as one that mourneth and is in bitterness for his first-born son. But you may whisper, these serious matters need not yet trouble me; I hope soon to get rid of my present complaint, and then to be as healthy and happy as I ever was. Remember, I beseech you, that the sands of time are silently and swiftly gliding down in the little hour-glass allotted to you, and if you continue unregenerate and impenitent till the last particles are run out, there can afterwards be no change of heart or character effected, no peace or hope attained: or, to vary the figure, your life may be compared to a taper which is continually wasting, and either may be extinguished by a sudden blast, or must soon sink by the course of nature, and expire in the socket; but if you continue in unbelief and impenitence till one of these events takes place, there will remain nothing before you but outer darkness and absolute despair. Heaven

with its joys, and hell with its woes, are exhibited in full view ; yes, and it is impossible to find admission into heaven without entering the strait gate and travelling in the narrow way, and equally impossible to escape hell if you follow the broad downward road which is trodden by the earnal and giddy multitude. If you, reader, have not thought seriously and in earnest on these things, it is high time that you should do so ; there is not a day, not an hour, not a moment to be lost. While you are under the chastening hand of God's Providence, hearken to the warning voice of His word. " Seek ye the Lord while he may be found ; call ye upon him while he is near ; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Isa. lv. 6, 7. A time is coming when it will be in vain to seek God, or call upon his name, or wait for his salvation. The door of mercy once shut, it will be useless to knock and presumptuously hope for admission. From

the exhortation of the prophet above given, turn to consider the following language of our Lord:—"What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Oh! solemn and searching words! how they ought, like thunder and lightning, to rouse the conscience and pierce the heart! The worth of an immortal soul cannot be fully told, for language is baffled in the attempt; its loss, therefore, can by no imaginable acquisitions be compensated; yet perhaps you have hardly employed a thought about this precious jewel, while the frail casket in which it is inclosed has engrossed all your time and all your care. If conscience bears witness to the truth of this supposition, what a life have you hitherto lived! How devoid of real good, how full of evil, how far from righteousness and peace! Oh that your anxieties may henceforth be more for the deathless soul than for the dull, dying body! God has opened the treasures of his sovereign, superabounding grace to you in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus

Christ. It is a message of pardon and peace; it is glad tidings of great joy to those who are ready to perish. Who can declare the value of this message, which bears the impress and seal of heaven? "It gives the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins, through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

But so long as you continue far from God and without Christ, you will be a stranger to true peace; so long as you love darkness rather than light, you will rest under the dread sentence of condemnation. John iii. 18, 19. The very thought of this ought to rouse you from carnal ease and slumber like the sound of a tempest or the shock of an earthquake. Let not then your solieitude be all respecting the means of restoring the poor feeble flesh to health, when it ought chiefly to be concerning the remedy provided for the healing and salvation of the soul; the former is compara-

tively of small moment; the latter is of incalculable and everlasting consequence. Adversity has been called the school of wisdom, but we learn nothing profitable there, unless we learn the worth of the immortal spirit and the way in which it may be saved. Everything else is empty and fleeting as a dream of the night. What are science, fortune, and fame, much as they are sought and prized in the world, compared with the blessing of being made wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus? You are smitten by the hand of justice, that you may seek and find shelter in the asylum of Divine mercy. God strips, humbles, and afflicts us that he may clothe us with the royal robe of righteousness, set us upon the Rock of Ages, and fill us with rich consolation. An appeal may be made to facts in proof of this. Manasseh was a wicked king, and both a patron and encourager of wickedness; “but when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him, and he was entreated of him, and heard

his supplications. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God." 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12. "It is good," said the prophet Jeremiah, "that a man bear the yoke in his youth." This was strikingly exemplified in the experience of the celebrated Richard Baxter. "He was," says Mr. Orme, his biographer, "attacked at an early age with a violent cough, spitting of blood, and other indications of consumption. These symptoms continued to distress him for two years, and powerfully tended to deepen his religious impressions. He himself, in old age and near his end, said, 'Weakness and pain helped me to study how to die; and that on studying the doctrine from which I must fetch my motives and comforts; beginning with necessities, I proceeded by degrees, and now am going to see that for which I have lived and studied.' " The late Dr. Bateman may be adduced as another instance, though not like Baxter, in the morning, but the evening of life. He had lived in the total neglect of religion, and was infected with infidel principles. During a long and painful

illness, he was induced to hear the Scriptures and books of piety read by a Christian friend. He received and felt the truths of Christianity, and often heartily thanked God for the tedious affliction laid upon him. "It is," said he, "quite impossible to describe to you the change which has taken place in my mind; I feel as if a new world were opened to me, and all the interests and pursuits of this have faded into nothing in comparison of it. They seem so mean and paltry and insignificant, that my blindness in living so long immersed in them and devoted to them is quite inconceivable and astonishing to myself."

Have you, my reader, a faithful, affectionate teacher, or a serious sympathizing friend, who is always ready to visit you, to counsel and admonish you? O prize such a treasure! regard him as an agent of the God of love, as a commissioned messenger of mercy and peace! While he is dropping a tear of tenderness over you, or pouring out the prayer of strong faith and feeling for you, or opening the great doctrines and promises of the Gospel to you, do not show

signs of impatience and uneasiness, but give him your ear and your heart with ingenuous frankness and childlike docility.

But particularly consider the solemn warnings and calls of that God in whose hand your life is. Though you have rebelled against him, he is still extending his compassions towards you. Be concerned to know your real state. Read and hear the word of truth with seriousness. Pray for light and grace from above. If there be a movement of conviction and desire, cry to God that it may increase rather than abate.

A Prayer for one who is alarmed with a sense of his danger.

O God! be merciful to me a sinner. I have done evil in thy sight, and am not worthy of a place with thy people. Cut me not down in my iniquities as I deserve; cast me not off as I fear, to endure thy wrath and displeasure. O Lord, for the sake of thy Son Jesus Christ, forgive all my sins. He is the only Saviour and Redeemer of men. I beg forgiveness and acceptance in his name and through his merits. O Lord

God, in thy goodness preserve me, and let not my soul be utterly lost and undone. I have perverted and abused thy mercies, and set at nought the counsels and commands of thy word. O what would become of me if I were to die in my present guilty state ! My place would be hell, and my portion everlasting misery. Lord, save me and deliver me from the fearful doom of perdition and despair. I cry unto thee, although I know not how to pray as I ought. Gracious God, teach me and lead me in the way I should go. Let this affliction be for the good of my precious never-dying soul. Help me to believe, with all my heart, in Jesus, the Mighty and Merciful Redeemer. He died upon the Cross for us men and for our salvation. O that the Holy Spirit may thoroughly search and soften this heart, and enable me to rely only on Christ. O God, deal mercifully with me and spare me. Turn thou me, and I shall be turned ; stir up my soul, and quicken me for thy name's sake, and snatch me from the gulf of ruin, for the sake of Jesus Christ, thy dear Son. Amen.

CHAPTER II.

Second Use of Affliction.

To produce a deep-fixed attention to the concerns of the soul in those who have been sometimes seriously impressed, but have soon had their impressions worn away.

To live in a land of Bibles, and yet live entirely estranged from the principles, the duties, and hopes of Christianity, is an awful thing; yet thousands and tens of thousands among us are in this dark and deplorable condition. But I will suppose that the reader of these pages has thought frequently on the interesting subject of religion; has felt pungent convictions of conscience, and sometimes wept and prayed. Ah! you may exclaim, my mind has at seasons aspired after heaven, but the tumults of business, the temptations of the infernal enemy, and the deceitfulness of sin, have hurried me back into the world. Surely a time of affliction should be a time of faithful inquiry and close self-scrutiny. “When the tide of prosperity is low and

almost ebbed out, and the storm of persecution or affliction rages, then it is your breakers warn you of your danger; then you learn the true survey of the bottom ground: whereas, when the tide is high and the sea calm, you have not the advantage of such valuable discoveries. Affliction, therefore, is the only true and good source of spiritual information; then is the time to make your survey and correct your chart*."

The prophet Jeremiah, amidst the heaviest privations which befel him and his countrymen, speaks thus:—"Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again unto the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts with our hands to God in the heavens." It is no easy matter to search and try our ways. We are all backward to look within, to detect and cast out secret idols; yet if the welfare of the soul requires this work it must be done; and we should pray for grace to enable us and fit us to commence and prosecute it

* Captain W. H. Angas.

with fidelity. It is only when enlightened and strengthened by grace that we stir up ourselves to take hold of a covenant God. This is one great end of affliction.

While your hope for futurity, and your evidence of an interest in the lot and portion of the saints, are mixed with clouds of doubt and perplexity, religion will be your trouble, rather than your comfort. It is necessary then that the mind be in good earnest, resolutely intent on the *one thing needful*. Beware of being lulled into a soft soothing ease, and a carnal confidence. Paul, writing to the Philippians, saith, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure." Behold here presented to you the grandest and weightiest object which can interest human creatures; it is the salvation of the soul, or an actual deliverance from the guilt and bondage, the misery and bitterness of sin. To attain this important object, the understanding must be enlightened, the will must be subdued, the lusts of the flesh must be cut off, and

the whole body of sin must be mortified and destroyed. We are indeed called to cast down pride, to resist the devil, to renounce the world and its vanities, to watch and pray, and fight the good fight of faith, that we may lay hold on eternal life. Is this a work to be done by a few hurried fits and starts, or by nature's own resources? Impossible! quite impossible! With all our hearts and minds "we must labour for the meat which endureth to eternal life," and pray for the manifestations of God's love and favour, and strive as in an agony against sin in all its forms and movements; yet when the greatness of the matter at issue is considered, every exertion, every prayer, every conflict, may well be accompanied with fear and trembling, lest we should seem to come short of the heavenly rest and the immortal prize. But the apostle presses us to work out our salvation, by the most powerful motive, adding, "for it is God who worketh in us, both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure." We are feeble, *He* is mighty; we are constantly liable to change, *He* is unchangeable; we

are full of sin, He is full of grace and mercy. The influence which God exerts over the human mind, is a mystery which we cannot explain, yet a fact which we dare not deny; he inclines the will, and melts it into sweet submission, prompting every energy to acts of obedience in his service; yet there is no compulsion, no chain of blind fatalism to enslave us. We are to work, *because* it is God who works in us; the urgent exhortation derives its encouragement from the assurance joined with it. Those professors of religion, who make the doctrine of grace a plea for self-indulgence and sloth, are turning to the worst purpose, the best boon and highest privilege bestowed on man. Indeed the whole strain of Scripture instruction is in perfect harmony with the remarkable passage above quoted. Witness the language of Peter, after foretelling the spirit of sceptics and scoffers in the latter days:—"Ye, therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness; but grow in grace, and in the

knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Witness the language of Jude: — "But ye beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Here duty is enjoined, in plain pointed commands, and solemn warnings; while grace and mercy are referred to as the sources which supply the only effectual motives and encouragements to obedience. Strong religious impressions are often like the morning cloud or early dew that goeth away. What for a while seems lovely and promising is soon vanished and lost. Hence the need of that Divine influence which keeps the heart alive to God.

Reader, do any of your acquaintance affirm or insinuate, that a fixed attention to religion will drive you to melancholy? This is the senseless cry of vulgar ignorance and rooted prejudice. The charge, by whomsoever made, is unfounded and false. A fixed and earnest concern about the salvation of the soul imparts an interest

which directly counteracts the tendency to mental dejection. This morbid feeling is usually generated by the wear and tear, which both the body and mind sustain amidst the exhausting pleasures and oppressive cares of the world, aggravated by a systematic resistance to the calls of God, and the dictates and remonstrances of an accusing conscience.

One of our old divines published a book with the quaint title, “The Cure of Melancholy by Faith and Physic.” And it is true enough that when the malady is owing partly to the shattered state of the body, and partly to the guilt of the mind, it may be as necessary to use medicine as the truths of the Gospel effectually to remove it. A living writer has shrewdly remarked, “that the very phrase, religious melancholy, involves a contradiction. It is like speaking of the darkness of noon-day. There is no melancholy in religion, nor is there any religion in melancholy; and where disease is not the cause of dejection, it is, in every instance, not religion, but the want or deficiency of religion, to which the evil is justly

to be ascribed *.” When, however, we speak of Christianity as the best antidote in this case, many assert that we are too partial to be admitted as witnesses. Divines, they exclaim, have the honour of their own profession to uphold, and are not to be implicitly trusted. I will here, therefore, adduce the testimonies borne by one of our greatest philosophers and one of our most eminent moralists:—“ Religion, whether natural or revealed, has always the same beneficial influence on the mind. In youth, in health, in prosperity, it awakens feelings of gratitude and sublime love, and purifies at the same time that which it exalts ; but it is in misfortune, in sickness, in age, that its effects are most truly and beneficially felt ; when submission in faith, and humble trust in the Divine will, from duties become pleasures, undecaying sources of consolation ; then it creates powers which were believed to be extinct, and gives a freshness to the mind, which was supposed to have passed away for ever, but which is now renovated as an immortal hope. Its influ-

* Dr. Wardlaw.

ence outlives all earthly enjoyments, and becomes stronger as the organs decay, and the frame dissolves; it appears as that evening star of light in the horizon of life, which we are sure is to become in another season a morning star, and it throws its radiance through the gloom and the shades of death*.” Real alleviation of the loss of friends, “and rational tranquillity in the prospect of our own dissolution, can be received only from the promises of Him in whose hands are life and death, and from the assurance of another and a better state, in which all tears shall be wiped from the eyes, and the whole soul shall be filled with joy. Philosophy may infuse stubbornness, but religion only can give patience†.”

But you may say, the common prejudice you have been combating has no place in my mind. I see and own the truth and importance of Christianity. I am convinced that it is the only source of peace and hope and solid joy. But the convictions of my conscience have been overborne a thousand times by my passions. I discover the right

* Sir Humphry Davy.

† Dr. Johnson.

way, and wish to pursue it, yet am warped aside, or driven from it, I scarcely know how or why. Oh ! that I might have the portion and inheritance of the faithful !

Consider, I beseech you, this affliction as designed of God to bring you to himself and bind you to his service. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and other things, as they may be needful, will be added to you. Let the interests of your soul, which are of pre-eminent value, engage your time and heart. All things else are as painted toys or empty glittering bubbles. And remember that if you are saved, it can be only according to the tenor of the Gospel. The words which Jesus has spoken are spirit and life. As you imbibe them, you will honour and trust, love and follow him. Inquiry, reflection, and prayer will avail little, so long as they are vague and general. You must have a definite and distinct view of your sins to be truly humble, and a definite distinct view of the great sacrifice, to be animated with an intensity and real earnestness of mind in seeking pardon and peace.

A Prayer for the Patient who desires an interest in salvation, and an evidence of that interest.

O most mighty and mereiful Lord God, who art the Former of my body and the Father of my spirit, thou hast laid thy ehastening hand upon me, and I feel how frail I am. Alas! how long have I forgotten thee, and the things which belong unto my pceae! Thou hast in infinite goodness sent message after message, and warning after warning; thy truth hath been often sounding in mine ears, and thy judgments passing before mine eyes; yet have I been sleeping in earnal ease, dreaming of long life and of a late repentanee. I do confess that this poor perishing tene-ment of flesh and blood has ooeupied all my time and care, and I have been saying "What shall I eat, what shall I drink, and wherewith shall I be elothed?" while the immortal part hath been entirely neglected. In the solemn duties of religion I have moeked thee with eold and heartless formalities, and myself with feeble, fluctuating resolves. O leave not my soul to sink

under thy wrath and displeasure into endless perdition. Come, Lord, and take possession of it by thy sovereign grace, and form it for thy service and glory. Henceforth fix my thoughts on the things of eternity, purge my conscience from all the stains of guilt, subdue and sanctify my will, and raise my affections from vanity and dust to the pure and lasting joys of heaven. Grant me grace to honour and obey thee in this world, that I may rise to enjoy thy blissful presence in the world to come, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER III.

The third Use of Affliction.

To lead us to Christ, the Light and Life of men, the Rock and Refuge of the Church, our only Mediator and Redeemer.

Oh! to be brought to Jesus' feet,
 Though sorrow fix me there,
 Is still a privilege, and sweet
 The energies of prayer,
 Though sighs and tears its language be,
 If Christ be near and smile on me!

After the prodigal son had wandered far from home, and had wasted his substance in riot and excess, it was, when reduced to wretchedness and want, to degradation and woe, that the delirium of his passions subsided, and gave place to sober reason and reflection. "When he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be

called thy son." The parable is full of instruction and encouragement. We are all wanderers and apostates, and seldom think of a return and reconciliation to God till some painful shock of calamity or some sharp visitation of grief, banishes the visions of fancy and awakens the powers of conscience. God makes the dealings of his Providence subservient to the dispensations of his mercy. That affliction is intended to bring us back to him from whom we have sadly revolted, seems to have been the opinion of good men from the earliest times. Thus speaks Elihu:—"A man is chastened with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain; so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat: if there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness: then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom. Lo! all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the

living." Job xxxiii. 19, 29. In this remarkable passage, the spiritual benefit designed to be imparted by bodily affliction is taught in the plainest language, and, in addition to this, an intimation, though somewhat obscure, is given of the method in which pardon and grace are dispensed, namely, through a ransom-price found and accepted by the righteous Judge of all. When we read the New Testament, the doctrine of redemption shines, as if written with sun-beams, and every cloud is scattered. There is no access to God but through a Mediator, a voluntary and responsible surety, a glorious and all-sufficient Saviour. And have we not such an one in Jesus, the Son of God, who assumed human flesh and appeared in the form of a servant? O greatest of all wonders! O mystery of mysteries! that in his person should be combined the perfections of God and the infirmities of man, in order that, as a fit daysman, he might stand between the offended majesty of heaven and the guilty offender, to turn away wrath. Hath he not himself said, "I am the way, the truth,

and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me."

Come, then, afflicted man or woman, whosoever thou art, to Jesus, and make him thy trust. Blind, helpless, condemned, polluted, and miserable in thyself; in him thou shalt find wisdom and strength, righteousness and peace, a pattern and example for time, a portion and source of joy for eternity. Art thou dismayed or doubtful when such a proposal is made? Our blessed Lord and Saviour invites us to come to him, and promises that we shall in nowise be east out. He saith, "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Be it unto us, blessed Jesus, according to this thy gracious promise! Shine upon us, thou Sun of Righteousness, that ignorance and error, which are like dense fogs and black clouds, may be chased away from our minds! In thee are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, let thy word dwell richly in us and direct our steps.

But Christ also calls us to him, that he

may endue us with strength. Sin has withered all our powers. In spiritual things we are weak and unstable as water, and cannot excel. But what Christ said to Paul, he says to every one who looks to him with ardour and depends on him with simplicity. “ My grace is sufficient for thee ; for my strength is made perfect in weakness ;” and every sincere believer is warranted to reply, and without a particle of presumption may reply, “ Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmity, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

Again, we must go to Christ for righteousness and peace. The perfect law of God condemns us for our countless and aggravated transgressions. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against every act which swerves in the least point from rectitude, and every word or thought which savours of impiety. How, then, shall we be cleared of guilt and stand with acceptance before the sovereign Judge of all ? Not by any of our own doings or devices. To expect this were as vain and foolish as

to think of scaling the loftiest heavens by the arts of human invention or the efforts of human power. But Jesus Christ satisfied the claims of justice when he made a full atonement on the cross, and honoured the law of God when he fulfilled all its commands; he is therefore truly called "the Lord our Righteousness." Oh! exalted and endearing name! what sweet significance! what stores of consolation! what treasures of glory does it comprehend! Here the doctrine of justification, on which our Reformers laid so much stress, demands a moment's attention. "We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings." "This righteousness, which we so receive of God's mercy and Christ's merits, embraced by faith, is taken, accepted, and allowed of God, our perfect and full justification." Here, then, renouncing all pride and self-sufficiency, we find solid ground of dependence. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Well spake he

to his disciples, "In me ye shall have peace." "There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." Their sins are pardoned through his precious blood, their souls are justified by an interest in his meritorious and perfect obedience. The treaty and covenant of peace has been sealed and ratified, and cannot be made void. Happy the saints who enjoy this inestimable blessing, which the world has neither power to give nor take away!

We must look to Christ as our pattern and example, through all the stages and revolutions of time. Conformity to his word, his character, and his conduct, is both our duty and privilege. "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." John xiii. 15. If we love and revere him, we shall obey his commands, and tread in his footsteps; we shall be meek and humble like him, gentle and forbearing like him, tender and benevolent like him, and prepared, like him, to act with energy and zeal, and suffer with patience and resignation, for the honour of God and the accomplishment of the work

he has given us to do. And, lastly, we must look to Christ as our future portion and eternal joy. All the splendour of heaven would fail to impart happiness, if Immanuel were to withdraw his presenee. But he has said to his sineere followers, "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you. I will come and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." The prize of our high calling is God in Christ Jesus, so that every Christian, with the mourning prophet, may exclaim, "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him."

And now let me ask, what think ye of Christ? Do you see and admire his excellency, and count all the treasures and possessions of the world but dross and dung in comparison with him? Do you wish to be led to Christ as your light and wisdom, your strength and victory? Are you prepared to renounce all trust in your own righteousness, that you may cleave to his merits? Do you seek the peace and

rest he has promised to give to them who are weary and heavy laden? And are you anxious to have his image and likeness here below, that you may enjoy his presence and glory in the world above?

Augustine confessed, that when, in his youth, he was seized with a dangerous illness, he was exceedingly desirous of Christian baptism, but speedily recovering, all his alarms vanished. He, like many others of that age, thought baptism would wash away all his sins. In our day, not a few, while languishing on the bed of sickness, send for a clergyman to give them the sacrament, and pronounce over them the solemn form of absolution, as the last and best means to which they can apply for safety and peace.

Ah! these sacred rites and ceremonies will not profit those who are ignorant of God and his righteousness, and are wrapt up in a covering of pride and conceit!

If affliction leads you to the Gospel, and the Gospel leads you to Christ, and you become a partaker of his fulness, and finally a partner of his kingdom and glory, what

reason will you have to be thankful for the very losses which terminate in such gain, and the sorrows which issue in such joy!

But perhaps you may be ready to cry out, O I am unworthy to touch the hem of his garment, and receive soul-healing virtue from him! Scarcely do my hopes begin to rise, ere they are overpowered by a host of fears! If I go to Christ, will he not frown me away? I have too long slighted his overtures, and neglected his great salvation. To these desponding suggestions, I reply, the mercy of Jesus is equal to his power, and both are infinite. He is *able* to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us. But is he, you may eagerly ask, *willing*? Yes, of this his own word gives us absolute assurance, wherein he saith, “Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.”

A Prayer.

O, thou God and Father of all, hear my prayer, when I call upon thee. I have heard thee saying in thy word, “Awake,

thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." But though I have started for a moment, alas! how quickly have I sunk again into profound slumber. Thou sentest thine only begotten Son into the world, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life. "Lord, I believe, O help thou my unbelief!" Yes, I believe that Jesus Christ was the great Prophet, who appeared to make known thy will to the children of men, unfolding the mysteries of Providence, and unveiling the scenes of immortality—that he is the unchangeable high priest of the church, who paid down his life as a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, and offered up his soul as a sacrifice for sin here on earth, and having entered into the holy place not made with hands, for ever liveth to make intercession for us above.—I know that he is the anointed King of Zion, and the Prince of Peace, swaying a sceptre of power and righteousness, grace and mercy over the hearts of all his servants. Yet, alas! I seem far from Him, and bound in fetters

which keep me back, fetters and chains which I cannot break ! Blessed Jesus ! adorable Immanuel ! God with us, as this thy name imports, lighten my darkness, strengthen my weakness, fill my cold heart with sacred love, draw me to thy foot-stool, and set me free from guilt and fear. I am naked, destitute, and undone. Come clothe me with the spotless robe of thy righteousness, and with the beautiful garments of salvation ; feed me with the bread and water of life, which thou only givest ; and cause me to participate and enjoy the promises and privileges which belong to thy saints. Come take my soul, and cast it into the mould of Gospel truth, that it may bear thy image. Let thy grace be sufficient for me, that I may be enabled to resist temptations, and go through trials and conflicts, without dismay and depression. And O when my earthly course is finished, call me up into thy glorious presence, and say to me, Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER IV.

The Fourth Use of Affliction.

To convince us that we need the power, guidance, and grace of the Holy Spirit, and that the precious gift must be sought by urgent and unwearied prayer.

“The worldly man admits, that the poor who have little to enjoy, and the idle who have little to do, cannot do better than make over to God that time, which cannot be turned to a more profitable account. Religion, he thinks, may properly employ leisure and occupy old age.” Ask why he thinks so, and you will soon find it is because the former is not in his possession, and the latter is deemed so distant, as scarcely once to enter his thoughts.

There is another fallacy which has a most extensive prevalence. In the flush of youth, and the vigour of health and maturity, amidst the gaieties and bustles, the tangling thorns and snares of life, we all feel it difficult to attend to the calls and

concerns of religion ; but we think that in a time of sickness and adversity, at some future period, we shall find this as easy as the motion of water down a gentle declivity, or the ascent of flame in the free vital air. Strange delusion ! which by a sort of witchery, continues so long to infatuate the mind ! When we come into affliction, we find the same inability, or reluctance, to think of God and eternity, to enter into the holy warfare of the Christian life, as in the days of health, and plenty, and peace. It is a moral malady, deeply seated in the heart, a depravity which taints the whole soul ; not merely an effect of some peculiar train of outward circumstances. “ We all, like sheep, have gone astray ; we have turned every one unto his own way.” “ For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” Have you found since the visitation of God’s chastening hand was upon you, the truth of what the prophet and the apostle affirm in the words above recited ? It is a humbling

but may be a useful lesson. “ He who is brought to serious reflection, by the salutary affliction of a sick-bed, will look back with wonder on his former false estimate of worldly things. Riches! beauty! pleasure! genius! fame! what are they in the eyes of the sick and dying?”*

But he will hardly be more astonished by the review of the past, than the aspect of the future. The erroneous notion which he formerly entertained, on the facility of securing true peace and solid hope, amidst the last feeble and fitful glimmerings of reason, and the last painful efforts of memory and thought, appears now the very height of absurdity and extravagance.

I have before said, that we cannot approach to God, but by Christ as the way; and it is equally true, that we cannot come to Christ, but by the Holy Spirit as our guide and teacher. Christ was the messenger and surety sent by the Father; the Spirit is the minister and agent sent by the Son. We learn indeed from the lips of Jesus, that it is the special office of this

* Mrs. More.

Divine Instructor to testify of Immanuel, and reveal to us the boundless riches of his grace, and the matchless glories of his kingdom.

“ The work of Christ, and the work of the Spirit, are mutually necessary to each other’s efficiency, and are alike indispensable to the salvation of the sinner. Without the work of Christ, the Spirit would want the means or instrument of his operation ; and without the work of the Spirit, these means would remain fruitless. Christ has opened the way of access to God ; the Spirit brings sinners to God, in the way which Christ has opened.”*

Do you feel the difficulty of attending to the things which appertain to the soul ? The things which are essential to its present peace and future felicity ? Does the stream of nature run with a strong current against the feeble desires after heavenly realities, which at times rise and struggle within ? You need the Spirit of God to open and enlarge your understanding in the knowledge of revealed truth, to change the bias and remove the

* Dr. Wardlaw.

bondage of the will, to purify and elevate the affections. The apostle John, addressing his Christian brethren, said, “Ye have an unction of the Holy One, and ye know all things.” It is this unction, or, to lay aside the figure, this divine influence, which opens the eyes of the mind to see the glory of God in the person and work of Christ. Then it is that prejudice falls, and the darkening clouds of error and delusion break away, disclosing to our astonished and enraptured view a new scene of wonders, interesting and important beyond what language can express or imagination can conceive. There is a sense in which every man is perfectly free to choose or to refuse that *one thing needful*, without which there is no happiness. External compulsion or restraint would be utterly inconsistent with our probationary state, as rational and accountable creatures. Yet so long as sin reigns, the will is under a bias to evil, or, as Martin Luther used to express it, is in bondage. The Spirit of God changes the bias, breaks asunder the chains of bondage. When this takes place, the slave of sin and

the captive of Satan becomes free. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

It is by the influence of the same Divine agent that the affections are purified from corrupt adhesions and raised from the despicable toys and trifles of earth to the rich treasures and substantial delights of heaven. As the mysteries of redemption are unfolded and displayed, as the unwasting and exhaustless fulness of Christ is discovered, and as the brightness and blessedness of immortality are perceived and realized, the soul of a believer experiences a sublime and ineffable transformation. "We all, saith the apostle, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." After perusing such portions of the word, we see good reason why the Third Person in the adorable Trinity should be called *the Comforter*. All the peace and consolation enjoyed by the church of God is derived from his gracious agency. Saints of every age and clime must depend on his influence and operations to their last hour. And this

they do, as examples numberless sufficiently prove. "Oh!" said the late pious Jane Taylor, "it is hard fighting in our own strength against the evil bias of the heart, and external enemies. Their united forces are, I am daily more convinced, far too much for any thing but grace to overcome. No good resolution, no efforts of reason, no desires to please, can alone succeed; they may varnish the character, but O! how insufficient are such motives for the trying occasions of life." A late valuable minister, being asked on his death-bed whether he felt the power of the truths which he had often declared and recommended to others, replied, "I have no hope of being saved but by grace, through faith. I still feel the need of the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit*."

If you ask how this precious boon is to be obtained, I answer, by prayer. There is scarcely one point in the whole compass of divine truth more clearly settled than this. Without, however, multiplying quotations from the Holy Scriptures, one

* Rev. Joseph Benson.

passage may here suffice. “If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” Luke xi. 11, 13. Is not the promise here plain, full, direct, and explicit? Does a single shade obscure its meaning, or a single word of secret reserve weaken its force? Could a more appropriate example have been introduced to illustrate the main design? A philosopher would have spoken on the subject in general, indefinite terms, and given the sentiment in a cold abstraction. But he who knew what was in man, introduces the exquisitely tender and endearing relation which subsists between a parent and a child; he appeals to the strongest and best instinctive feelings of our nature. A father will never refuse necessary food when he has it in his possession, at the suit of his own offspring; he

cannot close his ears against their plaintive piercing cries of hunger and pain; and his very spirit recoils with horror from the thought of mocking and insulting, instead of feeding and satisfying those who are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. And think, then, of the infinite goodness and unchanging faithfulness of God. O ask of him his Holy Spirit to enlighten your mind, to awaken your conscience, to renew your heart. Can any thing be effectually done to promote your eternal welfare without him? Are you not conscious of your weakness and sinfulness and utter insufficiency? Ask for the Holy Spirit, to give fixedness and decision to your resolutions, sincerity and simplicity to your motives, ardour and elevation to your desires.

A Prayer.

O Almighty, blessed, and eternal God, I now come, and in the name of Him in whom thou art well pleased, I ask for grace to keep me in all my ways; for wisdom to instruct and direct me in all my wanderings and ignorance; for courage to confess Christ

before men ; for all those fruits and graces of thy Spirit, which shall enable me to glorify thy Name in the world, and to serve my fellow-creatures for their good, until I am gathered to my fathers, and see corruption. And when the enemy comes in with the power of an overwhelming flood, or with the subtilty of hell, or in the garb of an angel of light, do thou stand by me and deliver my soul. When pain and sickness try this mortal body, do thou impart the meekness and resignation of a lamb to my spirit. When death itself approaches, and the solemn scenes of eternity unfold themselves to my view, do thou enable me to read my title clear to a habitation not made with hands, eternal in heaven, for Jesus Christ's sake.

Unto thee, the eternal Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, the communicative love, who condescendest to make perfect the elect of God, do I deliver up this dark, imperfect soul, to be further renewed, confirmed, and perfected according to the Holy Covenant. Refuse not to bless it with thine indwelling and opera-

tion; quicken it with thy life; irradiate it with thy light; sanctify it by thy love; actuate it purely, powerfully, and constantly by thy holy motives. And though the way of this thy sacred influence be beyond the reach of human apprehension, yet let me know the reality and saving power of it by the happy effects. Thou art more to souls than souls to bodies, than light to eyes. O leave not my soul as a corpse destitute of thy life, nor its eyes as useless, destitute of thy light; nor leave it as a senseless block without thy motion. Alas! I feel, I daily feel that I am dead to all good, and all that is good is dead to me, if thou be not the life of all. Teachings and reproofs, mercies and corrections, yea, the Gospel itself, and all the liveliest books and sermons, are dead to me, because I am dead to them. Yea, God is as no God to me, and heaven is as no heaven, and Christ as no Christ, and the clearest evidences of Scripture verity are as no proofs at all, if thou represent them not with life and power to my soul. Transcribe those sacred precepts on my heart, which by thy dic-

tates and inspirations are recorded in thy holy word. I refuse not thy help for tears and groans; but oh! shed abroad that love on my heart which may keep it in a continual life of love. And teach me the work which I must do in heaven. Refresh my soul with the delights of holiness and the joys which arise from the believing hopes of everlasting joys. Exercise my heart and tongue in the holy praises of my Lord. Strengthen me in sufferings, and conquer the terrors of death and hell. Make me the more heavenly by how much faster I am hastening to heaven; and let my last thoughts, words, and works on earth be likest to those which shall be my first in the state of glorious immortality, where the kingdom is delivered up to the Father, and God will for ever be all and in all; of whom, and through whom, and to whom, are all things. To whom be glory for ever. Amen. *

* The Prayer above is taken from the Author of the Retrospect, and from the Rev. Richard Baxter.

CHAPTER V.

The Fifth Use of Affliction.

To show us in a touching and impressive manner the utter emptiness, vanity, and barrenness of the present world, and the folly and misery of seeking our portion in it.

The *world*, in the simple and original import of the term, means the visible framework of the planet which we inhabit. We see the atmosphere adorned with silvery or crimson clouds at sunset, the earth covered with a carpet of exquisite verdure during the summer months, the sea at one time smooth as an expanse of glass, at another rolling in its capacious bed, with an aspect of awful majesty. It is impossible for the contemplative eye to glance upon these without a sentiment of admiration kindling within, which may well prompt us to exclaim, "What an assemblage of wonders is presented to our view! Almighty Maker, how are thy perfections displayed in all

things which thou hast made ! Thou hast formed every thing beautiful in its time, and useful in its place, and admirably fitted for the purpose to which it is destined ! How vast thy power, how bright thy wisdom, how rich thy goodness ! ”

But the *world* is far oftener used as a moral term, to designate the fallen, degenerate race of mankind, together with the possessions, pursuits, pleasures, customs, fashions, maxims, opinions, and visionary phantoms, which occupy their time, fill up their thoughts, engage their passions, and mock their sanguine expectations. In this sense is the word used by our Lord, where he assures us that the world hated him because he bore his faithful testimony against the evil of its works. And John, in his practical exhortation to Christians, said, “ Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world ; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father.” It is exceedingly evident that the apostle

here distinctly marks out and condemns *sensuality, covetousness, and aspiring ambition*. To these may be traced those follies, vices, crimes, and abominations which, like foaming, impetuous torrénts, have in every age deluged and desolated the earth.

The sensual give themselves to the gratifications of unbridled appetite, and fall into lewdness, luxury, and excess. “Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue till night, and wine inflames them. And the harp, and the viol, and tabret, and the pipe and wine are in their feasts, but they regard not the work of the Lord, nor consider the operation of his hands.” Isa. v. 12. The voluptuous, here so strikingly described by the prophet, are the slaves of self-indulgence, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; and whether they plunge into the grossest profligacy, or study to save appearances by keeping up some sort of refinement and cautious reserve, in either case the effects are still deadly and ruinous. The covetous are smitten with the love of silver and gold,

and become the wretched drudges and vassals of Mammon. To what mean and mercenary arts, to what wearisome and exhausting labours, to what painful privations and racking cares, do they voluntarily submit, that they may join house to house and lay field to field ! And after they have gathered a mass of sordid pelf, which they dare not use, do they not commonly leave it to prodigal heirs, who despise their memories, while they consume their possessions ? How justly hath an inspired monitor declared that “ they who will be rich (resolved to compass their object by any means, and at all hazards) fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.”

The ambitious, who aspire to power and honour, panting eagerly after high offices and titles, are usually but a small remove from madness. They venture their *all* in a lottery where there are a thousand blanks to a single prize ; they start in a race where only a very few out of the multitude of candidates can ever expect to be crowned. He

who in this daring career fails is at once crushed and trampled down by fierce, insulting rivals; and he who succeeds gains a slippery eminence, wears his fool's cap and feather to provoke the gaze of envy; or, like Damocles at the table of Dionysius, sits down to a rich entertainment with a naked sword hung over him by a feeble thread.

A desire to please the world and a solicitude to please God present the completest contrast of character which can be imagined. "While we keep this single point in view, above all things to aim at pleasing God, whatever variety there may be in our actions, there will be uniformity too, which constitutes the beauty of life—uniformity without being dull and tedious, and variety without being wild and irregular. How would this settle the ferment of our youthful passions and sweeten the last dregs of our advanced age! How would this make our lives yield the calmest satisfaction, as some flowers shed the most fragrant odours just at the close of the day*."

* Seed.

“ But the impotence of the world never appears more conspicuous than when it has exhausted its powers in the gratification of its votaries by placing them in a situation which leaves them nothing further to hope. It frustrates the sanguine expectations of its admirers as much by what it bestows as by what it withholds, and reserves its severest disappointment for the season of possession. The agitation, the uncertainty, the varied emotions of hope and fear, which accompany the pursuit of worldly objects, create a vivid interest and maintain a brisk and wholesome circulation; but when the pursuit is over, unless some other is substituted in its place, satiety succeeds to enjoyment, and pleasures cease to please. Tired of treading the same circle, of beholding the same spectacles, of frequenting the same amusements, and repeating the same follies, with nothing to awaken sensibility, or to stimulate to action, the minion of fortune is exposed to an insuperable languor; he sinks under an insupportable weight of ease, and falls a victim to incurable dejection and despondency*.”

* R. Hall.

Both St. Paul and St. John affirm that the world passeth away, and the fashion thereof. It is like a glaring empty pageant, which for a few moments gratifies the eyes of the vulgar, and then disappears. The world resembles a theatre, where the gaudy scenes are often shifting and changing, where the actors are trained to assume dresses and characters which do not belong to them, where the whole drama in its scope, plot, and incidents, is intended to fascinate and deceive the spectators and audience, and where the dark avenues are filled with harlots, and thieves, and assassins, waiting to rob and murder the victims they can ensnare; or, to borrow a comparison from a late gay nobleman, it resembles one of those dreams produced by opium, full of vivid and splendid images, of strong and rapturous emotions while the drug works, but afterwards followed by disappointment and disgust, by mental darkness, desolation, and horror, for which language cannot furnish a name.

It has been justly observed by Bishop Hopkins, that all the vanity that is in

worldly things is only in respect of the sin and folly of man, expecting what they cannot perform. “Doth any man lie the softer because his bed-posts are gilt? Do his meat and drink relish the better because they are served up in gold? Is his house more convenient because better carved and painted? Or are his clothes more fit because more fashionable than another man’s? And if they are not necessary to these natural uses, all that is left them is but fancy and opinion*.” Sensual pleasure dies in the birth; gold goes into any gate but the gate of heaven, and there finds no entrance; the honour which cometh from men never leads to God. These maxims deserve full credit, though they seldom gain it.

David speaks of “the men of the world, who have their portion in this life.” O worthless and wretched portion! if we consider the toil of getting, the care of keeping, and the grief of losing it! What! and is this the mighty all, for which myriads barter away heaven? Incredible folly,

* See a striking sermon by Bishop Hopkins on the vanity of the world.

bordering on phrenzy! Moreover, those who have their entire portion in this life will be sure to meet their punishment in the next. Like Dives in the parable, they will be doomed to leave their rich fare and fine purple, to endure the anguish of a tormenting flame, and see a great gulf fixed, effectually to separate them from the means of relief and the mansions of bliss.

But empty and barren as the world is, we are all naturally much in love with it. In the ardour of youth, we view its more distant scenes as a perfect paradise; we hear the sound of mirth from afar, and grow impatient of every restraint, and eager to mix with the joyous throng. Age and its pains, affliction and its sorrows, should convince us how foolish it is to seek our portion in the world. They come from the mighty Sovereign of the universe with a commission to teach us this momentous lesson. O that we might effectually learn it, and live under its influence!

Solomon set out, determined to leave no region of the world unexplored, no art, science, beauty, grandeur, luxury, pleasure;

no smile of fortune, breath of fame, or stretch of despotic power, untried. Yet after an experiment upon the largest scale, and with every advantage in its favour, he came to the melancholy conclusion, "Behold all is vanity and vexation of spirit." It is more than probable that this sober estimate was formed amidst those pains and infirmities which attend old age. Even good men often need affliction to wean their hearts from the world. God chastens them that he may put down every rival, and more firmly attach them to himself. The esteemed President of an American college, when just raised from a dangerous illness, thus addressed his pupils: "Let me exhort you, my young friends, now engaged in the ardent pursuit of worldly enjoyments, to believe that you will one day see them in the very light in which they have been seen by me. The attachment to them which you strongly feel is unfounded, vain, full of danger, and fraught with ruin. You will one day view them from a dying bed. There, should you retain your reason, they will appear as they really are.

No longer pretended friends and real flatterers ; they will unmask themselves, and appear only as tempters, deceivers, and enemies, who stood between you and heaven, persuaded you to forsake your God, and cheated you out of eternal life."

Are you brought low by affliction? Learn, under this visitation, to form a true estimate both of present objects, possessions, pursuits, and pleasures, and of future eternal realities. And should you come back from the gates of the grave, never forget the lessons you have been taught, and do not throw away the fruits of your experience.

A Prayer.

O Lord God of truth ! I have too long been catching at shadows and phantoms, and setting at nought the durable riches and righteousness disclosed and offered in the everlasting Gospel of thy Son. The world, that wily sorceress, has too long bewitched me with her charms and enchantments. I have found her promises to be flattery and falsehood, her honied pleasures to be mingled with gall and wormwood, her treasures dross

and dirt, speciously gilded, her honours eventual infamy and shame. Father of my spirit, and God of my life, I fear lest the deceiver should practise upon me new arts of delusion, and again ensnare me. Give me understanding to discern, and fortitude to resist temptation. Let me neither be allured by the smiles, nor alarmed by the frowns, of the world. O that the grand and solemn scenes of eternity may be so realized by faith and devotion, that I may be able henceforth to look with a holy indifference on the poor worthless toys and trifles of time.

And, O blessed Jesus! Deliverer and Redeemer of men! as thou didst overcome the world, arm me with the same mind, and make me a conqueror, yea, more than a conqueror, through thy love. Thou art the Leader and Commander of thy saints, the glorious Captain of their salvation, who wast made perfect through sufferings. And shall I complain because I am called to follow thee through tribulation, that I may reign with thee? Shall I think it hard to fight the same foes when thou dost both

provide me heaven-tempered armour, and promise me strength according to my day? O let thy grace make me valiant for the truth upon the earth, and cause me to triumph over every enemy. Let the world hate me if I may but experience the sweetness of thy love; let the world cast out my name as evil, if it may but be found written in thy book of life. O come and cast me into the mould of thy Gospel, that I may bear the bright impress of thine image. Come, expand my nobler faculties, and spiritualize my affections, that I may soar to thy presence, and have my heart where my best treasure is. Amen.

CHAPTER VI.

The Sixth Use of Affliction.

To humble, subdue, and soften our proud, stubborn hearts, and lay us prostrate and penitent at the footstool of the divine mercy-seat.

Forgetfulness of God involves ingratitude to him; and ingratitude towards God, our best benefactor, is a crime of the deepest dye. It must, however, be granted that, in a state of uninterrupted health and ease, when almost everything falls in with the train of our wishes, we are all too apt to forget God, and to withhold from him the daily tribute of thanks, which is due to his name; or if some form of religious service is kept up by custom, we are too high-minded and too cold-hearted to feel any real interest in it. And should it not then seem to follow, as a fair inference, that the smooth and placid course, which we naturally desire, cannot, in the long run,

be really good for us? Peter said to the first Christians, "*If need be* (and this is often the case with us) ye are in heaviness, through manifold temptations." We are too short-sighted and imperfect to form a correct judgment as to what is necessary for our welfare, or conducive to our profit. He who sees the end from the beginning, and effects in their causes, can never err in his appointments. Even the sages and teachers among the pagans had some faint gleams of light on this subject. Seneca long since said, "That man is most unhappy to whom no adversity has ever come." And Epictetus declares, "That, as man has the voyage of death before him, whatever may be his employment, he should be always ready to embark at the master's call." But with the Bible in our hands, we need not on this point, or any other essential to our happiness, ask counsel of the far-famed but bewildered philosophers of antiquity. Let us hear the prophet:—"O Lord, with my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judg-

ments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." Isaiah xxvi. 9. Hear Jehovah himself, by another of his servants :—" I will go and return to my place till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face ; in their affliction they will seek me early." Hosea v. 15.

We know that even good men, without trials, are apt to sink into supineness and apathy, or rise into a vain confidence, or a false security. David thought his mountain stood strong, and in his prosperity said, " I shall never be moved." But this sanguine, self-sufficient temper could not be allowed to continue ; God therefore hid his face from him, and he was plunged into troubles, and his mountain, before deemed so stable, was shaken even to its very foundation.

Men often talk lightly of their sin, and yet confidently of God's mercy. Nay, some, from the wonderful forbearance of Jehovah, go on to greater lengths of wickedness. This is the foulest abuse of mercy ; it is snatching at the sceptre of love, which God

holds out, to use it as a weapon in attacking the throne of his holiness, or in beating down the fence of his sacred commandments. Those who are the subjects of saving grace cannot be guilty of such horrid sacrilege. Yet they, too, have their sins, and must expect to be corrected for them.

The gardener who digs about the roots of his trees and prunes their luxuriant branches, has no design to destroy them, but to render them more flourishing and fruitful. The farmer also ploughs up his field, and breaks the hard clods, not to deform and spoil his land, but to clear it from noxious weeds, to mellow the soil, and prepare it to receive that grain, which is to spring up an hundred-fold and gladden the days of harvest. So God prunes away the decayed branches and wild shoots of those trees of righteousness, which are of his own planting, that they may bring forth much fruit; and he breaks the fallow ground of our hearts by the ploughshare of sorrow, that the incorruptible seed of his

divine word, striking deep root, may appear first in the tender blade, then the ear, and at last the full ripe corn in the ear.

Sometimes our carnal slumber is broken by the thickening shocks of disease and of death, which are taking place around us, and carrying off many to whom we have been strongly attached. “For when we see our enemies and friends gliding away before us, let us not forget that we are subject to the general law of mortality, and shall soon be where our doom will be fixed for ever*.” At other times the visitation of the hand of God comes home to our persons, and lays us on beds of pain and debility. Let us imagine what are the ends designed to be accomplished by these strokes. Surely it is to destroy pride, both in the branch and the root—it is to soften and melt away the hardness of our hearts—it is to kill our corruptions and quicken our graces—it is to separate us from the idols and vanities to which we cling, and unite us in closer attachment to Christ our Saviour.

* Dr. Johnson.

The address of God to his ancient Israel is instructive to us. "Thou shalt remember all the way, which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, and to see what was in thy heart." Jehovah assuredly needs not such a process to acquaint him with the depths of depravity, or the workings of innate corruption in any of the human race, but it is necessary for us to ascertain our own state and character. Reader, is it not the design of God, by your present trial, to lay you low in the dust of self-abasement, and to produce in you a spirit of contrition and penitence? Let me then urge you to examine yourself, that what has been wrong may be rectified, what is corrupt may be purged away, and what is wanting may be supplied. The experience of your sufferings should lead you to the consideration of your sins. Do not attempt to palliate them, or throw over them a veil of fine-spun, flimsy excuses; for it is written, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

“The reflecting Christian,” says a pious writer, “will consider the natural evil of sickness as the consequence and punishment of moral evil. He will mourn not only that he suffers pain, but because that pain is the effect of sin. If man had not sinned, he would not have suffered. The heaviest aggravation of pain, is to know that he has deserved it. But it is a counterbalance to this trial to know that our merciful Father has no pleasure in the sufferings of his children—that he chastens them in love—that he never inflicts a stroke which he could safely spare; that he inflicts it to purify as well as punish—to caution as well as cure—to improve as well as to chastise*.” That you may have a lively humbling sense of your sins, and a tender melting of heart on account of them, do not rest content with a hasty, indistinct review of your past life, but go into a strict and close inquiry. Think of the glorious perfections of that God whom you have provoked and offended.

You have sinned against his *justice*,

* Mrs. More.

which flamed out in the moral law given on Mount Sinai, all the commandments of which you have broken. Now, can it be truly said, this code is unreasonable and cruel? Let the precepts and sanctions be examined, and they will all appear holy, and just, and good. *Surely, surely*, you may cry out with the Psalmist, "Lord, enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." You have sinned against his *holiness*, which is opposed to all that defiles and taints, whether in thought, in word, or in deed; and when you view and steadily contemplate the unspotted purity of Jehovah, who cannot look on iniquity without displeasure, you may well exclaim, in the language of the prophet, "Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." You have sinned against his *truth and faithfulness*. Have you not lived as though his solemn declarations, his dreadful threatenings, and precious promises were vain

words? Have you not hearkened to the father of lies and turned a deaf ear to the God of truth? You may disclaim infidelity; but there is a secret distrust of the Divine word, virtually casting it aside, and burying it in oblivion, which implies infidelity in the heart, where no avowal of it has been made by the lips. You have sinned against the *goodness of God*. Call to mind the rich and varied bounties of his providence. How has he protected you amidst dangers visible and invisible! How has he supplied your numberless wants from infancy to this hour! How has he softened your calamities and redressed your griefs! And have you made grateful returns of praise for his favours? Rather have you not abused and perverted them to selfish and sinful purposes? You have sinned against the *mercy of God*. Mercy is the most wonderful and condescending of all the Divine perfections. It brought the Son of God from heaven to work out redemption for us, while angels gazed upon him with admiration and astonishment. It opens a door of hope and a way of help and

deliverance for our perishing souls. It spreads a feast of rich and heavenly provisions, and invites us to partake of it, without money and without price. But have you not made light of all these things, and treated them as idle tales? Have you not been too indolent or careless to give the message of the Gospel a fair hearing, or too much occupied with business and amusement, to attend with any seriousness and cordiality to the overtures of pardon and life made by Christ? Think of that God who sees through all disguises and searches your heart, and then say, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done all this evil in thy sight." View your character and conduct in the mirror of that law which is pure and perfect, and you will behold spots of a deep and dark grain. Consider the aggravations of your sin, as often committed amidst clear light and knowledge, and against the strong remonstrances of your own judgment and conscience. Place yourself at the foot of the cross, and weigh the evil that is in sin, as proved by the costly sacrifice required

to atone for it. Pray that the Spirit of God may open your eyes and touch your heart, and then, like the afflicted patriarch, you will say, “ Lord, I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee, and lo ! I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.” The difference between vague report, and dim notions, and personal experience, is very great. An old proverb says, “ Sorrow is good for nothing but for sin ; ” and I may add, sorrow *for* sin is salutary, but sorrow flowing *from* sin is bitter and baneful to the soul, and ever mixed with the wrath of the Almighty. A soul unhumbled is on the verge of ruin. Let me warn you, and entreat you to hearken to a faithful monitor :—“ Believe it, as long as you continue in a sinful state, you are wrapt about with ten thousand curses, the wrath of God is continually making its approaches unto you, and there is only a thin mud wall of flesh to fence it out, which is still mouldering and falling away, and whether it will be able to hold out one day longer you know not. You hang over the bottomless pit only by the

weak thread of frail life, which is ready to be snapped asunder every moment ; and if some consuming sickness should fret this thread, or some unforeseen casualty should break it off suddenly ; if death work a change *upon* you before grace work a change *in* you, of all God's creation you are the most miserable*." I shall, however, stay the fire of this tremendous battery. I know there may be a feeling of dismay at the mention of future punishment in the near view of death and eternity, when there is not a drop of true penitence, and the man who, like Felix, trembles, may, to use the words of the liturgy, be still "tied and bound with the chain of his sins." It is the mighty power of sovereign love which dissolves the heart and sets us free. The visitations of God's chastening hand are never productive of the good effects for which they were sent, till the soul be brought with weeping and supplication to the divine footstool. There we perceive the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the infinite preciousness of the remedy

* Bishop Hopkins.

provided, to save us from it. "Then godly sorrow worketh repentance unto life, not to be repented of." This is necessary not merely at the commencement of the Christian life, but during its whole progress. Penitence must continue, as long as sin remains. Where the health of the soul has been impaired by worldliness, or secret idolatry, or hankering after forbidden things, and yielding to compliances with corrupt and dangerous customs, a few cold, general confessions will effect no salutary change. It cannot be re-invigorated without being renewed unto repentance, as is evident in the case of David, and Peter, and many others. Affliction, therefore, forms a part of the scheme which Divine Wisdom has contrived for our good. "Riches, honours, and pleasures," says one, "are the *sweets* which destroy the mind's appetite for its heavenly food; poverty, disgrace, and pain are the *bitters* which restore it*." Let high thoughts be cast down—let hard thoughts of God and his providence be cast out—let secret sins be cut off, though dear as a

* Bishop Horne.

right hand. It is impossible that you should profit by the present visitation, unless your mind be led to serious reflection—unless your heart be softened to contrition, and all that is within you be drawn out in fervent prayer. “Humble yourself, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”

A Prayer to be used in the beginning of a Sickness.

“O, Almighty God, merciful and gracious, who in thy justice didst send sorrow and tears, sickness and death, into the world as a punishment for man’s sins, and hast comprehended all under sin, and this sad covenant of sufferings, *not to destroy us, but that thou mightest have mercy upon all*—making thy justice to minister to mercy, short afflictions to an eternal weight of glory; as thou hast turned my sins into sickness, so turn my sickness to the advantages of holiness and religion, of mercy and pardon, of faith and hope, of grace and glory. Thou hast now called me *to the fellowship of sufferings*. Relieve my sorrow

and support my spirit : direct my thoughts and sanctify the accidents of my sickness, and that the punishment of my sin may be the school of virtue ; in which, since thou hast now entered me, Lord make me a holy proficient ; that I may behave myself as a son under discipline, humbly and obediently, evenly and penitently, that I may come by this means nearer unto thee ; that if I shall go forth of this sickness by the gate of life and health, I may return to the world with great strength of spirit, to run a new race of stricter holiness and a more severe religion : or if I pass from hence, with the outlet of death, I may enter into the bosom of my Lord, and may feel the present joys of a certain hope of that sea of pleasures in which all thy saints and servants shall be comprehended to eternal ages. Grant this for Jesus Christ's sake, our dearest Lord and Saviour. Amen*.

† Bishop Jeremy Taylor.

CHAPTER VII.

The Seventh Use of Affliction.

To exercise faith, filial freedom, and hallowed fervour in those acts of private devotion, which form an essential part of Christian discipline, and furnish a rich store of Christian consolation.

A living writer, high in literary credit, has said, "It is certain that all the evils in society arise from want of faith in God, and of obedience to his laws; and it is no less certain that, by the prevalence of a lively and efficient belief, they would all be cured." Ah! let us remember that it is a *living* not a *dead* faith which raises us above the present world, and interests us in a better. It is this principle which brings us to take a part in the service and a pleasure in the presence of Jehovah. "Without faith (whatever else we may possess) it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh unto God must believe that

he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." If approaches to God are declined, if acts of secret prayer are neglected, there is either a total want of faith, or that which we have is languid, and drooping, and ready to die. In fact, nothing is more common among those who wear the garb of a Christian profession, than such a deadness of spirit, such distance from God, and distaste of his service. "There is no greater argument in the world of our spiritual weakness and the falseness of our hearts in matters of religion, than the backwardness most men have always, and all men have sometimes, to say their prayers, so weary of their length, so glad when they are done, so ready to find an excuse, so apt to lose an opportunity. Yet it is no labour, no trouble they are anxious to avoid, but the begging of a blessing and receiving it; honouring our God, and by so doing honouring ourselves too*."

In the days of health and affluence, devotion often dwindles to a dead form, or

* Bishop Jeremy Taylor.

even to a dry skeleton, till it vanishes at last like a shadow. Private prayer has been compared to a pipe concealed, through which blessings are conveyed into the soul; or to a key which opens the treasury of divine grace, yet, not used, we grow insensible to its value. Sickness and sorrow rouse us to return to the God from whom we have departed. "In the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our souls is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee." Isa. xxvi. 8. Severe trials, when sanctified, rekindle the dying embers of piety in our hearts. The name of the Lord is a strong tower, but we seldom fly to it for protection, till the storm or the enemy drives us. It is during the long, dark, wintry night of affliction, that we begin to pray for the help and pant for the favour of God.

But the exercise of true faith is joined with a greater or less degree of filial freedom at the throne of the heavenly grace. Prayer ever must be dull task-work to the superstitious and the self-righteous. They

cannot possibly love it, and yet dare not leave it altogether undone. Our great Master taught us the necessity and importance of prayer in private, both by his precept and his example. Warning us against the vain ostentation of those who not only stood forth conspicuously in the synagogues, but stopped in the corners of the streets to repeat their prayers, that they might be seen of men, and obtain applause, he adds, “ But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.” Matt. vi. 6. The duty here enjoined can by no shuffling, evasion, or crafty artifice, be set aside and nullified. But that which in one view is a duty, is in another a privilege, justly represented by the tender, endearing intercourse maintained between a parent and his child. Hence filial freedom, religiously taken, is the genuine spirit of adoption, looking up to heaven and crying unto God, Abba, Father. If we had not the warrant of Scripture, such an honour might seem

too exalted for such creatures as we are to expect. Again, there must be hallowed fervour in presenting our petitions and pouring out our hearts to God. Not that he can be moved by loud and impetuous clamour, or pleased by the multitude of our words. He neither needs to be informed nor requires to be persuaded ; yet he will have us made deeply sensible of our sins before they are forgiven, and of our necessities before they are supplied. There is a holy importunity in prayer, which, like Jacob's wrestling with the angel of the covenant, is always acceptable to God.

Reader, let this matter be well weighed and brought closely home, for it is one of the things in which fidelity is very rare. A dangerous enemy and a deceitful heart cannot be too narrowly watched. On a point like this, where no human witnesses have any control, there is no safety without circumspection and self-jealousy. "Make conscience of your secret worship ; keep it up, not only because it has been a custom received by tradition from your fathers,

but because it is a duty, concerning which you have received commandments from the Lord. Keep up stated times for it, and be true to them. Let those who have hitherto lived in the total neglect, or frequent omission of secret prayer, be persuaded henceforward to look upon it as the most needful part of their daily business, and the most delightful part of their daily comfort, and do it accordingly, with a constant care, and yet with a constant pleasure*.”

There is a peculiar solemnity and a pleasing awe in the consciousness of God's immediate presence with us. All other beings separated from us, we feel a profound reverence for the infinite and eternal Jehovah, with whom alone we have to do. The aspirings of the mind and the outgoings of the heart towards him are inexpressibly sweet and delightful. We can disclose our sins and wants, and conflicts, and fears more freely to our heavenly Father than to any creature. We believe that he is looking upon us with an eye of

* M. Henry.

compassion, that he is bending his ear to our requests, though whispered in feeble, broken accents, and even in sighs and groans, and we find a soothing sense of relief and a refreshment which cannot in any other way be enjoyed.

Prayer in private is an essential part of our Christian discipline. “Jesus spake a parable to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” The apostles command us to pray without ceasing, both for ourselves and our brethren. God could indeed have given us every kind of blessings, temporal and spiritual, in abundance, without our offering one petition, or pleading one promise at his mercy-seat; but this is not the method his wisdom has appointed and established. “For all these things, saith he, will I be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.”

If we follow the Captain of our salvation, we must wear his uniform, must obey his orders, must exercise ourselves unto godliness. Now the chief part of this exercise “is praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching

thereunto with all perseverance." Ask, and it shall be given you, is the standing order of his camp. What! some may exclaim, is this all? only ask, and have it immediately granted! I have not said, nor supposed any such thing. We all naturally want what seems desirable at once. Like children, we are impatient of any apparent delay. God takes his own time to give, and his time is unquestionably the best. Your petitions must be according to the Lord's will, must be presented in the name and through the mediation of Christ, and by the influence of the Holy Spirit. Use the Scripture as your directory. Look to Jesus as your Advocate and Intercessor. "Every prayer passes from us to God, and every mercy from God to us by his hand; it is in the face of the Anointed, that God looks upon us, and in the face of Jesus Christ that we behold the glory and grace of God shining." The Divine Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought. But even when you proceed in the right order, you are not to expect immediate answers.

Unless we earnestly look and long for the good sought for, and yet patiently wait the Lord's time, there is no discipline in the service. "The life of a Christian," says Mr. Brooks, "is filled up with interchanges of sickness and health, weakness and strength, want and wealth, disgrace and honour, comforts and crosses, miseries and mercies, joys and sorrows." Discipline is that exercise of faith and fervent devotion, joined with humble waiting and submission, which turns all events to our profit.

Again, prayer in affliction furnishes a rich store of comfort. From broken cisterns it conducts us to the fountain of living waters; from feeble props, which often give way and sink under us, it lifts us to the Rock of Ages; and when creatures, set up around us like candles, are consumed, or their light is suddenly put out, it brings us to the Sun of Righteousness. Mr. Flavel mentions an eminent Christian in Scotland, who lost by sudden death his only son, which sharp trial filled him with grief. After, however, being engaged for some hours in private devotion, when he

came forth, his countenance was gilded with cheerfulness. Being asked by his friends what had caused such a change in him, he replied, he had gained that joy in his retirement with the Lord, which to have renewed, he would be content, if it were possible, to lose a son every day. It were easy to illustrate our subject by many other examples, but two shall suffice.

Dr. Doddridge had many severe and dangerous fits of illness, and, as his biographer remarks, his prayers at such times were unusually fervid, and effectual in a high degree. After recovering from a fever, the Doctor thus writes to a friend: "It is impossible to express the support and comfort which God gave me on my sick bed. His promises were my continual feast. They seemed, as it were, to be united in one stream of glory, and poured into my heart. When I thought of dying, it sometimes made my very heart to leap within me, to think I was going home to my Father and my Saviour, to an innumerable company of angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect."

Charles Wesley had but a weak, and frequently an ill state of health, through the greater part of his life. He was much in prayer, and enjoyed great consolation. A few days before his death, having been some time silent, he called his wife to his bedside to write the following exquisite lines, which he had just composed:—

In age and feebleness extreme,
 Who shall a sinful worm redeem?
 Jesus, my only hope thou art,
 Strength of my failing flesh and heart;
 O! could I catch a smile from thee,
 And drop into eternity!

To you who suffer under the hand of God, let me again and again recommend believing, fervent, secret prayer. If, while you enjoyed health, you were too much immersed in business, in literary study, or in any other earthly pursuit, turn, O turn away from the things which perish in the using, and enter the gracious presence-chamber of the King of kings, the immortal and immutable Ruler of the universe, the only wise and true God. There confess, with unfeigned humility and contrition, all

your sins and transgressions, and beg a free, full, and everlasting pardon, through the blood and righteousness of Christ. There pour out your whole heart before the Lord; for he can turn your sighs into songs, and your sharpest griefs into rapturous joys. There lay down your burden and anxieties, and make known all your various wants and woes. If it be a relief to pour your complaints into the ear of a fellow-creature, and to repose an unshaken confidence on the bosom of a feeling and faithful friend, how much more to draw nigh with filial freedom to the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort? And remember, what we have stated above, that secret prayer is intended for the double purpose of discipline and consolation. One of the best evidences of personal piety to the individual who is the subject of it, is, a steady fixedness of mind, with glowing fervour of heart, in the sacred exercises of the closet. "Observed duties," says Mr. Flavel, "maintain our credit with men; but secret duties maintain our life." Now, as the spiritual life of a Christian increases

in vigour and power, he will be less liable to doubt of its reality. The hypocrite makes a blaze in his devotions, when other men are present, from whom he seeks applause; but in solitude, he is cold as death, and dark as the grave. The true Christian, in a prosperous state, finds his element in fellowship with God, apart from the noise and tumult of the world. There he breathes freely, and the heart-pulse tells the energy of the divine life within him. Perhaps you say, Alas! it is not so with me. Let us admit it; but are you anxious that it should be so? Can you say, "My soul followeth hard after God?" The child cannot instantaneously gain the strength of a man. If, in your first approaches to God, you should experience restraint rather than liberty, fear rather than hope, be not discouraged. Communion with God is a privilege which we cannot estimate truly, nor enjoy fully at once. As you pause to ponder over the divine promises, as you think of the Saviour's mediation and grace, and renew from time to time your supplications, you will find an opening and en-

largement of mind, and a kindling ardour of spirit.

A Prayer.

O, thou that art the Hearer of prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come. I desire to approach to thee with reverence and deep humility. I am not worthy to stand or bow before thee, yet viewing the case of the penitent publican, like him will I smite upon my breast, and cry ‘God be merciful to me a sinner!’ O Lord, I have wandered far from thee, and followed the evil imaginations of my own heart. My prayers have been cold and lifeless, and I blush to think how I have mocked thy glorious majesty with words without meaning, and forms without feeling. Blessed God, thou hast vouchsafed sparing mercy, even when I asked it not, grant me now thy saving mercy. Jesus Christ thy Son, who on earth died as a victim and a sacrifice to take away sin, now lives at thy right hand, as an intercessor, to plead for sinners. O let my prayers be heard and accepted for his sake. And grant me, good Lord, the

spirit of adoption, that I may cry Abba Father, and come with holy boldness to the throne of grace, that I may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Draw me with the cords of love, and feed me with the heavenly manna, wherewith thy children are fed. O God, let the sufferings thou hast laid upon me be rendered profitable to my soul. May they embitter sin and cause me to follow after holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. In the furnace of affliction remove my dross, and make me a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use. O let me find rest and refreshment in thy presence. I would fill my mouth with arguments to plead with thee, and implore life and favour; send me not empty away. Put forth thy hand to uphold me, and lift up the light of thy countenance upon me. Most merciful God, let me know the sweetness of communion with thee, and forsaking, yea abhorring, all things which thou hast forbidden, from this time may I find in thy service perfect freedom.

“ Keep alive in me, O Lord, a true spirit of devotion : and preserve me from the great sin of praying to thee with my lips only, and not with my heart and mind. Sanctify to me my crosses and afflictions, and give me such a measure of patience and godly resolution that I may willingly take up my cross daily and follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. O Lord, if I have now asked anything amiss, I pray thee pardon my ignorance and infirmity; and whatsoever is good for me, even if I ask it not, be pleased to grant to me, in the name and for the sake of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, our only Mediator and Advocate. Amen*.”

* Bishop Blomfield.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Eighth Use of Affliction.

To teach us the importance and value of those public means of grace and ordinances of religion, which in the days of health and ease, we are so apt to neglect or attend with coldness and formality.

It is a trite remark, that we rarely know the worth of any blessing till we are deprived of it. This will apply to things spiritual, even more forcibly than to such as are temporal. Who can deny the importance of the Christian Sabbath, the ministry of the Gospel, and the celebration of public worship? Yet it is a fact that, in our country, two-thirds at least, or, as some calculate, three-fourths of the entire population absent themselves from the house of God. To see the resorts of folly crowded every Lord's day, we might be tempted to ask, are these people avowed infidels and blaspheming atheists? It has

been remarked very truly by an ingenious and able writer, "There is nothing which mankind are with so much difficulty brought to believe and assent to as a religion wherein the corruptions of their nature are condemned, and their sensual pleasures are restrained and mortified, although it is a religion infinitely excellent in itself, and absolutely necessary to them*."

Dr. Chalmers has observed, that the stoutest-hearted sinner, when laid on a bed of sickness, which he dreads to the last, often gives a welcome to the teacher he has too long slighted; and he that has been accustomed to laugh the ministrations of his Christian friend away from him will at length send an imploring message, and supplicate his prayers. Those of us, who are in the habit of visiting the afflicted and the dying, can bear our testimony to the truth of this observation. Nor is there a single subject on which the terrors and reproaches of conscience draw forth more frequent and bitter expressions of regret than the con-

* Skelton.

tempt or the neglect of public worship. This sin seems to rise up in dark colours and appalling forms, which render the prospect of a future reckoning dreadful. How often in the sick chamber have I been reminded of Solomon's description of the dying sinner, mourning at the last, when his flesh and his body are consumed, and saying, "How have I hated instruction and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me ! I was almost in all evil, in the midst of the congregation and assembly !" What vast numbers have confessed that the profanation of the Sabbath was the first step which led to their ruin !

Oh ! you may impatiently exclaim, I have never gone such lengths. Perhaps not ; but have you duly hallowed the Sabbath ? Have you devoted it to God, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words ? Isaiah lviii. 13. Have you gone to the sanctuary, not to see others, and be seen by them, but to hear and embrace the

precious word of life? Has that word opened to you the awful and the glorious realities of eternity? Has it grappled with your conscience, and gained a lodgment in your heart? Has it unveiled to you the inexhaustible fulness of Christ, and led you to make him the ground of your hope and the object of your desire and affection? Have you always esteemed the public worship of God a most solemn and indispensable duty, and a rich soul-reviving privilege? Have you felt a thrill penetrating your soul on reading the heaven-inspired command? “Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and the stranger that is within thy gates, that they hear, and that they may learn and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law.”

Public worship is one of the means of grace, admirably adapted to our benefit. It suits our feelings and habits as social creatures; it knits our hearts to each other. We weep and mourn together; pray and sing together; and mingling our sympathies in the most solemn acts of religion,

indulge the humble hope of meeting one another in that happy world where parting is unknown. Real Christians, regenerate souls, hold intimate fellowship in the house of God. They have common sins and infirmities, common wants and necessities, common mereies and privileges; and there they join in common confessions, supplications, and thanksgivings. Yes, there they feel themselves members of the same mystical body, children of the same family, and heirs of the same inheritance. They acknowledge and adore the same Father, through one Mediator, and by one Divine Spirit. Hence the faithful have ever highly prized the public worship of God, and felt it a heavy loss to be cut off from the privilege. David considered it the bitterest part of that exile, into which his enemies and persecutors had driven him, that it deprived him of the sacred and delightful services of Zion. “O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory,

so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live ; I will lift up my hands in thy name." Psalm lxiii. 1—4.

But all have not communion with the saints who form part of the same visible assembly, or meet within the same walls. There may be much in public worship to excite a *general* interest ; much to gratify the eye, the ear, and the imagination in the sight of a large congregation, in the sound of sacred music, in the earnestness and pathos of an able preacher. Yet many go not hungering and thirsting for the bread and water of life, but hoping to gather a few drops of honey from the flowers of eloquence ; not panting to soar to spiritual attainments on the steady wings of faith, but to rise a little above the dead level of formality and indifference on the fluttering pinions of fancy.

Prisoner of affliction ! how did you prize and use the public means of grace while you had health and opportunity to attend them ? Did you not sometimes forsake

them altogether to follow worldly company and amusement ; and at other times frequent them as a man goes to a piece of tedious task-work from which his spirit recoils ? I entreat you to be faithful, and bring these inquiries home. It is one thing to fill a place in the house of God, as a matter of custom, and another thing to worship him in spirit and in truth. Men who are bent upon the things of time—one going to his farm, another to his merchandise, and a third to his festivities and pleasures, are ready enough to commend the forms and decencies of religion. Have you not been more anxious to obtain the approbation and good-will of such characters, than to bear the cross of Christ by casting in your lot with his genuine followers ? Augustine, in his confessions, ingeniously owns, that the instruction of his pious mother, from his youth had carried conviction into his understanding and judgment, but his appetites and passions drew him among proud, aspiring, or gay, dissipated companions. One while he was the slave of ambition, another the dupe of plea-

sure. “O,” he exclaims, “thou light of my heart, and bread of my inward man, and true husband of my soul! I loved thee not; still I was applauded with well-done on all sides, and should have been ashamed to have been otherwise disposed. Ah! the friendship of the world is rebellion against thee.”

I ask again, have you acted against your own judgment, in seeking the smile of worldly men, rather than the favour and presence of God? Surely the remembrance of it must now be to you as gall and wormwood. Methinks I hear you sigh out, O lost and wasted Sabbaths, what would I give to have you restored! O grievous and aggravated mockery of the King of Heaven, to draw near to him with my lips, and honour him with my mouth, when my heart was far from him! Were I cast down to hell, among hypocrites and unbelievers, I have deserved the fearful doom! Lord, spare me yet a little longer, and raise me again from the gates of death! *Then, then* will I set apart thy sacred day to holy

things. O, how should I value and enjoy the instructions of the sanctuary ! No opportunity of getting spiritual profit, of gathering the heavenly manna, should in future be lost !

Let me, however, warn you against promising too much on the strength of your present feelings. I have known many invalids, whose vows of honouring God by a strict observance of the Sabbath and a regular attendance on the ordinances of Zion have soon vanished away, like the morning cloud or the early dew. The return of health has been the occasion of relapsing into all their former negligence and folly. It is well that you inwardly lament the loss you have sustained and the guilt you have contracted by the contempt or perversion of God's ordinances ; but trust in his grace rather than your own purposes and resolutions, for acting in a better manner in time to come. Remember, it is justice which wounds, and mercy which heals us. Sins against mercy are double dyed. " Every deliverance," says one, " is a bill

of indictment against the unthankful ;” and every one, who in health forgets his vows in sickness, must one day plead guilty.

But I will hope better things of you. Nay, it is possible that the public institutions of religion may have been your solace and delight. Methinks you answer, Ah ! I have sometimes been glad when my neighbours and friends said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Then I have at seasons seen his glory, and heard his still small voice of love, and tasted his grace, and felt his power, and set forth his praise. Then could I say with the disciples on the mount, “ Lord, it is good to be here !” But too often, alas ! there has been the sacrifice without the sacred fire ! too often the rich provision without a relish on my part to enjoy it ! I have sought him whom my soul loveth, but found him not. Well, meditate on the goodness of God. Surely it is pleasant and profitable to review his dealings and dispensations ; to muse on the works of his hands and the wonders of his providence and grace. “ The love of God has, indeed, abounded towards me in in-

numerable ways, both in temporal comforts and spiritual privileges. But especially am I indebted to his long-suffering and long-sparing mercy, that I have not been cut off in the midst of my sins; the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness is yet flowing, yet accessible, and that for me; the bread of life is yet tendered to me; the means of grace and the hope of glory are yet continued. There is still a way of access to the throne of grace, and the sure mercies of Christ may yet be obtained*." Such reflections will both humble and encourage you. For, as Bishop Hall says, "Prayer and meditation are twins, they enliven each other. Prayer maketh way for meditation; meditation giveth matter, strength, and life to prayer: by which, as all other things are sanctified to us, so we are sanctified to all holy things. This is as some royal eunuch, to perfume and dress our souls, that they may be fit to converse with the King of Heaven*."

* Bickersteth.

A Prayer.

Eternal and Almighty God ! thou hast brought me into deep waters of trouble that I might turn to thee for help and deliverance. Open, O Lord, my eyes to see the evil, the dreadful evil and deformity of sin, and the inexpressible beauty of holiness. Since thou hast shut me up in my own habitation, I have thought of thy glory and loving-kindness in thy temple. There, even there, hast thou recorded thy name and said, “ This is my rest for ever ; here will I dwell, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision ; I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will clothe her priests with salvation ; and her saints shall shout aloud for joy ! ” Oh ! thou Searcher of hearts ! thou knowest how often I have gone to thy house without one solemn thought of thy dread majesty, or one spark of desire after thy rich mercy. A message of grace was proclaimed, but my ears were uncircumcised, and I could not hearken. A feast of spiritual blessings was spread before me, but having no appetite,

I turned away with loathing and disgust. O, compassionate and long-suffering God, I deserve to be cast out of thy sight ; but, unworthy though I am, bring me again to thy holy hill and to thy tabernacle. It is my desire, and prayer, and anxious concern, that I may, during the remainder of the years, months, or weeks of my life, be found not only using the means of grace, but also enjoying the grace of the means. Give me, thou Fountain of Life and Love, to go to the place where thy truth is dispensed, saying with sincerity, “ I will hear what God the Lord will speak ; for he will speak peace unto his people and his saints ; but let them not turn again to folly.” Give me to join thy faithful servants, and worship thee without distraction of mind—without weariness of spirit—without vain glory, or vile hypocrisy. Is it not written, “ Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound, they shall walk in the light of thy countenance ; in thy name shall they rejoice all the day, and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.” O God, be it unto me according to this word. Let me

have the gospel of peace and be wise unto salvation ; let me behold thy glory in the face of Jesus Christ thy Son, and our divine Saviour ; let me serve and obey thee with all my heart, and all my soul, and all my might ; resisting the temptations of Satan ; renouncing the false maxims of the world ; laying aside the sins that most easily beset me, and running in the way of thy commandments with zeal and delight. Grant this, O Lord, for the sake of Jesus my Redeemer. Amen.

CHAPTER IX.

The Ninth Use of Affliction.

To move us at once to make a solemn surrender and dedication of ourselves, and all we have, to God, without any reserve or delay.

Perhaps you who peruse these pages are yet young and inexperienced; for pain and sickness and sorrow are limited to no age. How often do these cruel spoilers wither the rose which has just begun to bloom in the cheek, and reduce the strongest frame to perfect weakness! “When thou, Lord, with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth; surely every man is vanity.” Ps. xxxix. 11. Have you been convinced of the truth and excellence of Christianity? Have you perceived how necessary it is to our happiness, both in this life and in the life to come? Have you seriously thought over its doctrines, trembled at its threatenings, and rejoiced in its promises? O then,

at this season of grief and solitude, give yourself entirely to God, without any reluctance, without any delay. This is a duty which, where the prerequisites just noticed are found, cannot be declined or deferred without danger and loss. "The days of our life, as soon as ever the sun of reason rises in the soul, should be devoted to God and employed in his service. From the womb of the morning let Christ have the dew of our youth. The first-fruits were always to be the Lord's, and the firstlings of the flock*."

Just as this representation is, young people are apt to linger in suspense, or shrink back with trepidation, long after both God from above, and conscience from within, have called them to be decided. The confession and prayer of the celebrated Augustine exhibit this internal conflict in a touching manner. "As to myself in particular," says he, "I reviewed attentively how long I had been in the pursuit of the true wisdom, with a determination to give up secular pursuits, in case of suc-

* M. Henry.

cess. I had begun at the age of nineteen, and was now in my thirtieth year, still miserable, anxious, procrastinating, fed with tantalizing hopes, solicited in my conscience to set apart a portion of my time each day to the care of my soul." "O Lord, say unto my soul, I am thy salvation. So speak, that I may hear. My soul is a habitation too narrow for thy entrance; do thou enlarge it. It is in ruins; do thou repair it. It has what must offend thine eyes, I know and confess; but who shall cleanse it? or to whom shall I cry but unto thee?"

But whether you are young, or of mature age, or in the decline of life, dedication to God is your duty, and will prove your advantage. We allow that a sort of moral quarantine must be previously performed; but this must not be too rigid and protracted. In the grand concern of religion, men are ruined by either doubt or delay. They hover on the borders of the kingdom of heaven, but halt when they should take the first decisive step and enter; they parley with the enemy, and hanker after the

world, even when they have had proof of the deceit of the one, and the vanity of the other. Affliction offers a fair opportunity to break away from inglorious bondage, and acquire moral freedom, or rather, I should call it, spiritual emancipation ; but the occasion is too often lost. A thousand examples might be given, but one or two shall be mentioned.

The Marquis of Halifax was a man of great wit and vivacity. Though some thought him sceptical, he always denied the charge, and declared himself a believer of Christianity. " In a fit of sickness," says Bishop Burnet, " I knew him very much touched with a sense of religion. I was then often with him ; he seemed full of good purposes ; but they went off with his sickness." This is a very common case. The body faints under disease ; conscience, the sentinel of the soul, sounds an alarm, and fires a beacon ; the enemy retreats, and immediately the garrison and the sentinel sink again into shameful repose. The following concession was made by a man who had long wavered before he completely

forsook the world, to follow and serve the Great Master.

“ I find no difficulty in tracing up the indecision of purpose, and consequent feebleness of action, which often palsy the energies of my soul, to *a heart not fully given up to God*. I have frequently detected in myself a sort of indefinite desire after spiritual-mindedness, possibly because I was conscious that to be spiritually-minded is life and peace ; but, at the same time, felt that there was something to be surrendered, which I hardly knew how to resign, though I was well aware, by frequent experience, that till it was abandoned, all that I had previously relinquished was of no avail in procuring repose to my anxious conscience. And thus my mind has continued agitated, till I found rest in *an unconditional surrender* of my heart and affections into the hands of their only rightful sovereign*.”

If you ask what I mean by dedicating yourself to God, I reply, what Paul clearly intended, when he said to the Romans,—

* Christian Observer, 1821.

“ Yield yourselves to God, as those who are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” Again: “ I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” Rom. vi. 13, and xii. 1. There is nothing which the great Searcher of hearts more abhors than a timid, time-serving policy, under the mask of religion. For has not God a supreme claim upon the love of our hearts, the praise of our lips, and the obedience of our lives? He made us by his power, he sustains and keeps us by his Providence; he redeemed us, through mercy, by the mediation of his only-begotten Son. This last supplies the strongest possible motive to that entire and absolute surrender here recommended. “ We are not our own, but are bought with a price, and therefore are bound to glorify God in our body and our spirit, which are both his.” The same apostle, whose words I have just repeated, speaks in strong terms of approbation concerning the converts in

Macedonia. Their holy decision, the ardour of their zeal, and the rich and ready flow of their charity, made them fit examples to others. But their religion began well; for Paul says, “ they first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us, by the will of God.” Their conduct showed no disposition to rest content with certain trimming expedients and half measures. Oh ! there is something noble in a prompt obedience to the dictates of conscience, in a straightforward integrity and an unshaken adherence to the truth as it is in Jesus ! Where these prime excellencies are, minor defects and blemishes are but as spots in the sun ; but a dastardly spirit, on the contrary, turns the brightest talents to dross. A man hears the Gospel, and, strongly impressed with the grandeur and importance of the discoveries which it makes, thinks nothing shall induce him to trifle with matters of such high moment, or to disguise his sentiments. He meets opposition or ridicule, and then begins to confer with flesh and blood, and while the conference is going on, the infernal spirit,

who can transform himself into an angel of light, suggests the crafty council, "spare thyself," and adds, "be not righteous over much" (for Satan can quote Scripture, and dexterously misapply it); and the consequence is, the calls and claims of heaven are disregarded and set at nought.

Perhaps you are disposed to ask, "is this act of dedication, which you press upon me in the nature of a vow, accompanied with certain solemn circumstances and strange peculiarities? There are persons who, in giving up themselves to God, choose to join with the act some badge or burden of mortification, or some striking singularity. Thus Pascal, a pious devotee of the Romish Church, resolved to wear sackcloth next his skin, which he continued to do to the day of his death; and thus De Rentz, an eminent French nobleman of the Protestant faith, made a deed of gift of himself to God in writing, and signed it with his own blood. To say the least, such fancies and formalities savour far too much of monkish austerity and Pharisaic pride. It is true, and must not be denied, that a

dedication of ourselves to God, is a transaction of unusual solemnity, and has in it the nature of a vow. One instance from Scripture will furnish an illustration to the point. David, referring to a deliverance from great affliction, which consisted partly, at least, in bodily disease, said, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thy hand-maid; thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer unto thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord, now in the presence of all his people." Ps. cxvi. 12, &c. Consider this deeply interesting passage; it is the simple language of strong feeling, guided by an enlightened judgment.

Take the royal psalmist as your model and pattern. But in making a surrender of yourself to God, you should know something of his nature and his revealed will, and of his free mercy and grace, through the Son of his love, and the surety of the

everlasting covenant. Remember, it is a deliberate and voluntary act, a matter between God and your own soul. While you should not rush into it hastily, beware of delaying till your purpose and judgment are borne down by the returning tide of the world, and the passions of the flesh.

Moreover, I would honestly tell you that if you give yourself up to the Lord, you must also cheerfully consecrate all you have to his service. Nothing must be kept back as a reserve for secret sin, for Satan, or the world. This has been finely illustrated by a fact taken from ancient history. Respecting a transaction of deep interest it is recorded by Livy that Egerius, on the part of the Romans, inquired, "Are you the ambassadors sent by the people of Collatia to deliver up yourselves and the Collatine people?" They answered, "We are." Again, it was asked, "Are the Collatine people in their own power?" and the answer was, "They are." It was further inquired, "Do you deliver up yourselves, the people of Collatia, your city, your fields, your water, your bounds, your

temples, your utensils, all things which are yours, both divine and human, into mine and the people of Rome's power?" They answered, "We deliver up all." Egerius replied, "So I receive you."

Thus, in the covenant between God and the soul, the surrender on our part must be entire and complete. Not only natural life and strength, speech and reason, but all our civil and religious advantages, all our time, property, and influence are to be devoted to God. He is indeed the great Proprietor, and we sustain the character of stewards; therefore, in such a surrender as is here supposed and recommended, we are only giving him his own. Apart from him, we have nothing, deserve nothing, can do nothing, enjoy nothing, and are worse than nothing. When we yield ourselves to God, although every thing eccentric and singular, every thing tinctured with superstition, and tending to ostentation, should be studiously avoided, that we may not frame a galling yoke of bondage; yet it ought to be done with all circumstances fitted to promote deep seriousness and

reverence. “ The impressions of an invisible Ruler and Lord, as of all unseen things, are very evanescent ; soon, in a great degree, worn off, especially where not yet thoroughly inwrought into the temper of the soul. Hence is our instability in the covenant of God. We are not so afraid before, nor so ashamed afterwards, of breaking our engagements with him as with men, whom we often look in the face, and converse with every day. Therefore there is the more need here of the strictest ties and most solemn obligations that we can lay upon ourselves*.”

Weigh, then, the proposal made to you, and act according to the dictates of judgment and conscience. Be not moved and swayed by worldly considerations. Ask not, what will my old acquaintance and associates think? or what will my neighbours say of me? How shall I bear the sneers of some, and the artful insinuations of others? If you are not ready to take up the cross, you cannot be a Christian. But I hope you are come, or soon will come

* Howe, on Self dedication.

to the point of firm decision, determining no longer to halt between two opinions, no longer to hang in suspense between God and the world, but, like Caleb, to follow the Lord fully. I am aware that it has been objected, that having recourse to such religious contraets or forms fosters pride, and leads to legal bondage rather than evangelical liberty. But the objection is unfounded; for let it be remembered that the measure in question is not recommended except where a judgment of charity may conclude that the root and reality of personal religion exists. In the beginning of Beveridge's Resolutions is the following appropriate passage: "But let me dive a little into the depth of my sinful heart. What is the reason of my thus resolving upon an exact conformity to the will and word of God? Is it to work my way to heaven with mine own hands? To purchase an inheritance in the land of Canaan with the price of my own holiness and religion? or to swim over the ocean of this world into the haven of happiness upon the empty bladders of my own resolutions? No."

It has also been objected that an act of self-dedication aggravates the sin into which we may possibly afterwards fall. Doubtless; but may not the same be said in reference to every Christian ordinance and privilege? But voluntary ignorance or negligence will not ward off the evil. What would you think of a man refusing to plant a hedge about his garden, because it might be broken down again, and then a double loss would be sustained, both of his produce and fence? or of a man who deemed it prudent never to enter into any engagements with his fellow-citizens lest he should be tempted to violate them, and by so doing increase his guilt and misery? Really the pretence is frivolous.

When a Christian has fallen short of the uniform obedience to which he has voluntarily pledged himself, he must repent and return to the Lord. There is no reason why the same surrender or dedication may not be again and again repeated. The reader who wishes to enter more fully into this subject may peruse the 17th chapter of Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Re-*

ligion in the Soul, Beveridge's Private Thoughts, Mrs. Rowe's Devout Exercises of the Heart*.

A Prayer.

“ Lord God, the bonds of iniquity in which I have been held I scruple not to break, and repent that ever I made them. I took myself indeed to be my own, and have lived to myself only, pleased and served, sought myself, as if I were created and born for no other purpose; and if the sense of my heart had been put into words, there was insolence enough to have conceived such as these; not my tongue only, but my whole man, body and soul, all my parts and powers, my estate and name, strength and time, are all my own; who is lord over me? And while I pleased myself with such an imagined liberty and self-

* In Dr. Gregory's Memoir of R. Hall is recorded an “ act of solemn dedication,” which that great and good man made of himself to the Lord soon after the awful visitation which had laid him aside from his work—an act which he annually renewed on his birth-day.

dominion, no idol was too despicable to command my homage. I have done worse than prostrate my body to a stock; my soul hath humbled itself, and bowed down to a clod of clay. My thoughts and desires and hopes and joys have all stooped to such mean trifles as wealth, ease, pleasure, or fame, all but so many fragments of earth, or the less consistent vapours that spring from it. But now, Lord, I have, through thy mercy, learned to abandon and abhor myself. Thy grace appearing hath taught me to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts*.”

Blessed God, it is with the utmost solemnity that I make this surrender of myself to thee. “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! I avouch the Lord this day to be my God;” and I avouch and declare myself this day to be one of his covenant children and people. Hear, O thou God of heaven, and record it in the book of thy remembrance, (Mal. iii. 16), that henceforth I am thine, entirely thine. I would not merely consecrate unto thee some of

* Howe.

my powers or some of my possessions, or give thee a certain proportion of my services, or all I am capable of, for a limited time, but I would be wholly thine, and thine for ever. From this day do I solemnly renounce all the former *lords* which have had dominion over me, every sin and every lust, and bid, in thy name, an eternal defiance to the powers of hell, which have most unjustly usurped the empire over my soul, and to all the corruptions which their fatal temptations have introduced into it. The whole frame of nature, all the faculties of my mind, and all the members of my body, would I this day present to thee as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which I know to be my most reasonable service. To thee I consecrate all my worldly possessions; in thy service I desire to spend the remainder of my time upon earth, and beg thou wouldst instruct and influence me, so that, whether my abode here be longer or shorter, every year and month, every day and hour may be used in such a manner as shall most effectually promote thy honour and subserve the schemes of

thy wise and gracious Providence. And I earnestly pray that whatever influence thou givest me over others, in any of the superior relations of life in which I may stand, or in consequence of any regard which may be paid me, thou wouldst give me strength and courage to exert myself to the utmost for thy glory ; resolving not only that I will myself do it, but that all others, so far as I can rationally and properly influence them, *shall serve the Lord*. In this course, O blessed God, would I steadily persevere to the very end of my life, earnestly praying that every future day of it may supply the deficiencies and correct the irregularities of the former ; and that I may, by Divine grace, be enabled not only to hold on in that happy way, but daily to grow more active in it. And now to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost be all glory and praise. Amen.

CHAPTER X.

The Tenth Use of Affliction.

To allay the fretfulness and irritation of corroding care, and dispose us to form habits of patience and resignation to the divine will.

A long course of outward prosperity is apt to raise, at least in an active mind, sanguine and confident expectations, and to prompt such eager and impetuous pursuits, that disappointment and vexation are inevitable; and when they come they strike deep and leave wounds in the spirit, which are not easy to be healed. When God sends few cares and sorrows, we always make many for ourselves; and the latter are far heavier and sharper than the former. We often see those who, to a superficial observer, would seem to have everything which heart can wish, deeply chagrined by a failure of some favourite pursuit of wealth and power, or harassed with fierce compe-

titions, or weighed down with loads of trouble, which sour the temper and poison all the springs of personal and domestic peace. Affliction from the hand of God checks and counteracts this baneful influence of the world.

Many years ago I knew a person about the age of twenty, who was brought to hear the gospel, and gave some pleasing proofs of incipient piety. He entered upon business amidst great difficulties, struggled very hard, and after a while rose to notice and consequence in the world. But as he prospered in temporal things, the concerns of the soul (a case not uncommon) were less and less regarded. He was also high-minded, irritable, resentful, and held in little esteem by any class. When he had just reached his thirtieth year, God brought him to the confines of the eternal world by a bad typhus fever. Contrary to his own and his friends' expectation, he recovered his health, and the severe stroke was rendered salutary to his soul. Never had he quite given up the profession of religion, but under this chastisement his heart was

thoroughly ploughed up and softened to receive the seed of sacred truth. When he returned to the old pursuits of business, it was in a new spirit. There was an air of humility, meekness, and moderation in his countenance and manners, which struck every one. Nor did he hesitate to confess to myself and other friends how much cause he had to bless God for the visitation which had brought him under the shadow of death that he might be led into the way of life. I have often called this case to mind, and been encouraged by it, when called by my office to visit the afflicted. But if heart-corroding care be so baneful in the midst of life, how much more in the near approach of death! “To think of beginning a repentance which should have been completed—of setting about a peace which should have been concluded—of suing for a pardon which should have been obtained; all these complicated concerns—without strength, without time, without hope; with a clouded memory, a disjointed reason, a wounded spirit, undefined terrors, remembered sins, anticipated punishment,

an angry God, an accusing conscience, all together intolerably augment the sufferings of a body, which stands in little need of the insupportable burden of a distracted mind to aggravate its torments*.”

To have a calm serenity within, when all is stormy and tumultuous without, is an unspeakable mercy. But a voice is heard which ought to be obeyed, when it says, “Be still, and know that I am God. Fear not, for I am with thee, saith the Lord; I will help thee, I will strengthen thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” The saints are never under the *wrath*, but often under the *rod* of the Almighty; the curse is taken away, but the cross remains. “A sense of God’s presence in love is sufficient to rebuke all anxieties and fears in the worst and most dreadful condition; and not only so, but to give in the midst of them solid consolation and joy†.”

David felt himself consumed by the strokes of God’s hand, yet he uttered no complaint. “I was dumb with silence, I

* Mrs. More.

† Dr. Owen.

opened not my mouth, because thou didst it. And now, Lord, what wait I for ; my hope is in thee." "This," says M. Henry, "will reconcile us to every affliction, because it is the will of God ; in compliance with it, we must not only be silent, because of the sovereignty, but satisfied because of the wisdom and goodness of it."

Christian patience in affliction is a duty taught by the precepts and examples of our Lord and his apostles. He told the disciples beforehand what trials they should meet and bear, that they might not be taken by surprise, but be duly prepared. "In your patience," said he, "possess ye your souls." Interesting and most momentous injunction ! How little does it avail any man to retain his titles and offices, his temporalities and estates, his friends and flatterers, if he loses the calm possession and control of his own mind ! But he who gave this fine precept fully exemplified it ; for when the hour and power of darkness came upon him, and he was in an agony and bloody sweat, he cried, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me ; never-

theless, not my will, but thine be done.” “My brethren,” saith St. James, “count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing that the trial of your faith worketh patience; but let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” Here it is more than implied, that whatever virtues and graces there may be, without patience the Christian character is necessarily incomplete. But that we may be resigned to the will of God, we must beware that we do not give way to unavailing regrets. We may mourn indeed over past sins, but not pore despondingly over past sorrows. Bereavements, losses, and disappointments, were the inflictions of a father’s rod, and if we lament them inordinately, we arraign his wisdom, or impeach his goodness at our bar, instead of giving him the glory due unto his name. We must beware too of anticipating troubles not yet come. Anxiety foolishly looks forward into futurity, and pictures a gloomy scene of black disasters. We should, however, remember who hath said, “Take no thought,” or, as

it might be better rendered, "be not anxious for to-morrow ; sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." The future is in good hands, and we are therefore commanded to cast all our care on Him who careth for us. As water yields to the figure of the vessel into which it is poured, so ought we to yield to the circumstances into which Providence has cast us. We must beware likewise, that we do not look on present hostile appearances with an eye of sense, but on everything with an eye of faith. When the storm rages, we are naturally disposed to gaze on the waves and the breakers rather than on the anchor and cable, or the skilful pilot at the helm ; this is foolish, for common experience proves, in accordance with God's word, that in anticipated troubles we often come off better than we expected, and always better than we deserve.

Christian patience in affliction, is connected with a peace of mind peculiarly precious to the sufferer. It settles us on the only solid ground of dependence ; it renders inferior things subordinate and subservient

to those which are of supreme moment. "The soul," says one, "is of more importance than the body, and should be our principal care even in sickness; for we never need a physician so much as we do a Saviour." "He," an old divine remarks, "who would have his affliction short and tolerable, should quickly and quietly submit to God; for when we subscribe to his wisdom and submit to his will, it is better than if we leaned to our own understanding and had our own will." Those who have been in deep waters or fiery trials have spoken of the peace connected with patient suffering in the glowing language of experience. Witness the secure undaunted spirit of a Beza, a Luther, a Latimer, a Miles Coverdale, amidst their painful struggles and conflicts. The last-named of these venerable worthies somewhere says, "Unto them that love God he causeth all things to work for the best. So that with him, by the heavenly light of stedfast faith, they see life even in death; with him, even in heaviness and sorrow, they fail not of joy and consolation; with him,

even in poverty, affliction, and trouble, they neither perish nor are forsaken.”

It is possible that you may find your spirits so agitated that you can hardly read or hear any precepts to patience, without a fresh movement of irritation. How, you exclaim, can I be still in such a tempest? How can I command my thoughts, when pain and anguish overwhelm me with confusion? Oh, I am often led to think my own case is singular, and that none have suffered like me. My stroke is heavier than my groaning.” “Poor, trembling Christian, who art tossed with tempests and not comforted, try to lay thee down in peace and sleep; compose thyself into a sedate and even frame, in the name of Him whom winds and seas obey; command down thy tumultuous thoughts, and say, ‘Peace, be still;’ lay that aching, trembling head of thine where the beloved disciple laid his, in the bosom of the Lord Jesus; or if thou hast not yet attained such boldness of access to him, lay that aching, trembling heart of thine at the feet of the Lord Jesus, by an entire submission and resignation to

him, saying, If I perish, I will perish here; put it into his hand by an entire confidence in him; submit it to his operation and disposal, who knows how to speak to the heart*.”

Christian patience throws a lustre over the character, and recommends the religion of Jesus. There is a hardihood among some, which bears a resemblance to the stoutness and stubbornness of savages, who endure the acutest tortures without a groan; but this is not what we mean. Patience requires feeling; it can have no place in a stock or a stone. “There are three modes of bearing the ills of life:—by indifference, which is the most common; by philosophy, which is the most ostentatious; and by religion, which is the most effectual. Murmur at nothing; if our ills are reparable, it is ungrateful; if remediless, it is vain. But a Christian builds his fortitude on a better foundation than stoicism; he is pleased with everything that happens, because he knows it could not happen unless it had first pleased God, and that which pleases Him

* M. Henry.

must be best. He is assured that no new thing can befall him, and he is in the hands of a Father who will prove him with no affliction that resignation cannot conquer, or death cannot cure*."

It is by patience and resignation to the divine will, under severe and protracted affliction, that the reality and power of a living faith are visibly demonstrated. It is by patience and resignation that we are marvellously sustained, and enabled to glorify God in the fires, like the three Hebrew youths in the furnace. It is by patience and resignation, under painful and apparently adverse circumstances, that we show to worldly men the value of divine truth and divine grace in the most convincing and attractive of all forms. Hence the first martyrs of the church often conquered both their own fears and the prejudices of their pagan persecutors, winning a double triumph to their Redeemer's cause in their last conflict.

Submit yourself then to God, without a repining word or a rebellious thought. You

* Colton.

willingly take the bitterest medicine and yield to the surgeon's sharpest operations to cure your maladies and heal your wounds. How much more fully ought you to acquiesce in the dispensations of that God who never lays us low without designing to exalt us, or weakens or pains our flesh but for the health and welfare of our souls. The saying, "sanctified afflictions are spiritual promotions," whoever was its author, has gained the currency of a proverb, yet is it not more trite than true. Consider only the following words of St. Paul, "Knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." This is the most beautiful and comprehensive view of the happy effects of a state of sharp trial which can be anywhere found. Grace operates by affliction to produce four distinct benefits to the saints:—first, patience, waiting without weariness the Lord's time; next, experience, in itself a treasure; then hope,

ever wearing the blush and smile of youth in her countenance, and carrying the widow's inexhaustible cruse in her hand; and lastly, that high and hallowed confidence, which, leaving shame and all her sin-born train behind, vividly realizes immortal glory and presses onward to touch the goal and seize the prize.

To cultivate a spirit of uncomplaining resignation to the divine will, mark and imitate the character and conduct of Jesus, your great Master. What lamb-like meekness under the greatest provocations and insults! What calm forbearance and self-possession under the most agonizing sufferings and dreadful conflicts! If you say, who can approach the perfection of such a pattern? I reply, the written characters which our children are set to copy cannot be too fair or finely proportioned, and surely the same may be said of moral and spiritual excellencies. "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken unto you in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and of patience." James v. 10. But the same spirit of meek re-

signation which appeared in prophets and apostles has been shown by thousands of Christians down to our own day. We shall adduce two instances. To a clergyman who visited the Rev. John Newton in his long confinement, he said, "The Lord has a sovereign right to do what he will with his own. I trust we are his, in the best sense, by purchase, by conquest, and by our own willing consent. As sinners, we have no right, and if believing sinners, we have no reason, to complain; for all our concerns are in the hand and care of our best friend, who has promised that all things shall work together for his glory and our final benefit. My trial is great, but I am supported, and have many causes for daily praise."

When the late Rowland Hill had been severely crushed by a fall from his horse, and had been confined some weeks to his bed in the country, he was advised to seek assistance from medical skill in the metropolis to remove a dangerous inflammation from one of his eyes. "When he reached

his own house," says his biographer, "he rose into a frame of the most exalted piety, and walked up and down the room, breathing forth resignation to his chastening Father's will, with all the fervour of a sanctified use of affliction: in truth, the Lord was with him in the furnace, and all that the fire destroyed were the ties that bound him too closely to the earth and to himself. 'God,' said he, 'has laid me aside, has incapacitated me for his work, to humble me, to make me feel that I am nothing in his cause, and that I may more justly value the privilege of labouring for his glory' *."

A Prayer.

Graeious and most merciful God, I confess that I have often followed my own way rather than the way of thy preepts and testimonies. What ferments of discontent and fretfulness have risen up in my heart ! How have I forgotten the eountless com-

* The Life of the Rev. Rowland Hill, by the Rev. E. Sidney.

forts bestowed by thy hand, and complained in the bitterness of grief because the same hand has withheld some painted toy, or some polished cup full of poison ! In my health and prosperity how self-willed and irritable I was ; in sickness and adversity how have I struggled, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke ! Great God ! I own freely that righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto me shame and confusion of face ! If thou castest me into a sea of troubles, in that sea would not be one drop of injustice. If thou touchest me with the rod of correction, I have merited the flaming sword of destruction ! O Lord, why should any of our fallen guilty race deny thy wisdom or suspect thy goodness, when all are convicted of the wildest folly and the worst madness ? Behold I present my soul to thee, heal all its diseases, wash away all its stains ! And let this affliction mellow the soil of my heart, as the frost and snow of winter prepare the earth for the bloom of spring and the plenteous harvest of autumn. O thou, who sentest thy Son to be a teacher and

pattern of every virtue and excellence, help me to imitate him in meekness, and long-suffering, and entire resignation to thy will. Surely it is fitting that I should follow his steps, though at a humble distance. Oh ! that the same mind may be in me which was in Christ Jesus. Taught by the correction, and moved by the agency of the Holy Spirit, I would every day crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts; yes, and set myself against the swellings of pride, and the resentments of passion, and every thing opposed to habitual purity and peace. Alas ! my progress has been exceedingly small ! but thou, Lord, dost not despise the day of small things ! Let all the powers and desires within me be brought to revere and love, to honour and magnify thy word, and the dealings of thy providence. I have spoken rashly, but would lay my hand on my mouth ; I have done evil, do thou pardon it. O Lord, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. I have frequently uttered these words without thought or feeling ; O, dispose and prepare

me to urge them henceforth at thy footstool, with fervour and importunity, from day to day, from duty to duty, and from trial to trial, till I find myself free from every root and fibre of sin, and made meet for thy heavenly kingdom, which do thou grant for the sake of Jesus Christ, thy dear and only Son. Amen.

CHAPTER XI.

The Eleventh Use of Affliction.

To enable and dispose us when raised and restored, if such be the will of God, to enter with feeling and tenderness into the sufferings of our brethren and fellow-men, and prepare us to make sacrifices to serve them, to warn them of their dangers, and soothe them in their griefs.

It is possible that you who have been for a time the prisoner of affliction may soon regain your liberty. Perhaps the distemper has begun to subside; your pains are neither so frequent nor so violent as they were; or the burning heats of the fever, which drained your vital moisture and laid prostrate your strength, are gradually abating. May these favourable symptoms continue, and be followed by no terrible relapse! And whilst your appetite and your spirits return—whilst your food begins to administer strength, and your

sleep refreshment, to which you have been some time a stranger, what ought to be your first thoughts and warmest emotions? This is no puzzling query, hard to be answered. Doubtless you should think with lively gratitude of that God who has rebuked your disorder, and caused it to depart. It is he who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies, who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed as the eagle's." Ps. ciii. 3, 6. This portion of the divine word is admirably expressive of the feelings of every one who is convalescent. But it is a mournful and undeniable fact that we are all slow of heart to make suitable returns to our greatest and best benefactor. We may well fear the deceitful and hardening power of sin; we may well cry each one for himself, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name; bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!" But is there nothing self-

humbling implied in such language? Why are *all* the faculties, powers, and passions of the mind summoned to attend and unite in presenting the tribute of gratitude and praise to God, if they were not prone to wander from the post of honour and the path of duty like ill-disciplined soldiers or faithless subjects? Why is there any apprehension that numerous, inestimable, and lately-received benefits should be forgotten, if we were not too apt to forget the hand which feeds us, sustains us, reclaims us from error, revives us in sorrow, and restores us from sickness and the shadow of death to health and life and joy? David speaks as one experimentally acquainted with human depravity and corruption; and unless we have made some proficiency in this needful sort of self-knowledge, we shall be neither prepared to profit by mercies nor by judgments. We may hence also learn the necessity of seeking that grace by which the powers of fallen nature are renewed.

But supposing that my reader is convalescent, there is another topic worthy of

consideration. It is probable that while you lay languishing on your bed, complaining, like Job, of tedious days and wearisome, restless nights, you were not, like that afflicted patriarch, deserted or reproached by your friends. I will presume, on the contrary, that your kindred and connexions laboured with affectionate and unwearied diligence to assuage your sufferings; that they watched with solicitude the symptoms of your disease, wept over your pillow, and wiped away the profuse perspiration; that they hushed every noise and disturbance while you slumbered, anticipated your wants and wishes when you waked; that they sometimes whispered a word of encouragement in your ear, and breathed out many a sigh and many a supplication into the compassionate ear of your gracious Father in heaven. And ought you not to retain, while life lasts, a deep sense of their kindness, and of the obligations under which you are laid to them? Unless the heart were dead to every grateful and generous sentiment, it must vibrate, in reply to such a question, a

prompt and vigorous assent. On this trite topic, however, I shall not dwell.

There is another point which calls for a little more attention. God has planted sympathy in our nature, not that it should lie dormant, but be kept alive by exercise. Our sufferings are intended, as one part of their design, to fit us for the active services of benevolence. This doctrine is opened and enforced in the following scriptures. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." 2 Cor. i. 3, 4. The religion of Christ is a religion of love and mercy; for it proclaims and produces good will to men. "Remember them who are in bonds, as bound with them, and them who suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body." Heb. xiii. 3. How touching the last expression! Being in the body, we are compassed with infirmities, and liable to need the very help we are called to im-

part. The devoted philanthropist, Howard, intending to visit Lisbon, was prevented, by the vessel in which he sailed being captured. Taken as a prisoner of war, the sufferings which he endured, and witnessed in others, made a strong impression on his mind, and gave, it is believed, the first impulse to the career by which his after years were distinguished. Upon his liberation, he laid the state of his fellow-sufferers before the commissioners of the sick and wounded seamen, who received his information with thanks. And what prisons and hospitals, throughout the whole extent of Europe, he afterwards visited as an angel of mercy, is too well known to need repeating.

Has God brought you low and raised you again? Has he taught you his testimonies, and led you by his Spirit to the Refuge of souls, the Redeemer of men? Have you been cheered and refreshed by the ministrations of Christian friendship? Recollect, you are called to love your brethren, to pity and relieve their sorrows, to pray for them and with them, to bear

their burdens, that so you may fulfil the law of Christ—a law which will never lose its authority and force while there is misery and mortality in the world. To qualify for the discharge of these duties, the implantation of a principle of grace is absolutely necessary; but this is not all; for from some of the apostle's words above recited, it appears that the discipline of affliction also is ordinarily indispensable. Christians are fellow-heirs of the heavenly inheritance, and they are to be fellow-helpers on their way towards it. You have been in the school of adversity: let it be your firm determination to apply the lessons there learned, not only to your personal advantage, but likewise to the good of others. Give up a portion of your time to visit the sick, and pour out your tenderest sympathies and warmest supplications for them. This is a part of Christian duty which I fear is sadly neglected in our times. Public institutions connected with morality and religion are indeed liberally supported; but a pittance of money may be given with little or none of that

self-denial which is the best part of charity. “ Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” James i. 27.

Are you willing to make sacrifices to serve them, for whom Christ died? Are you ready to warn them of their dangers, and succour them in their troubles? The new commandment which our Lord enjoined on all his disciples requires mutual love. Where this affection is wanting, we look in vain for the distinctive features of the Christian character. “ It is only in religion,” says an able writer, “ that we can find the true philosophy of love ; for love, apart from the belief of an after state, has neither substance nor purity. It will be found, as matter of fact, that the faith of immortality and the feeling of Christian love are always in direct relation the one to the other, as to their intensity : if the one be in great force, the other is so ; if the first languishes in any age, the other disappears*.”

* Saturday Evening.

Silver and gold may be lavishly bestowed upon the poor for the sake of ostentation, where there is not a particle of charity. This may to many seem a paradox, but it is unquestionably true. 1 Cor. xiii. 3. Besides, as Dr. Dwight has observed, "There are innumerable cases of suffering, of which property cannot become the relief. Of this nature are those of sickness, pain, sorrow, disgrace, decrepitude, friendlessness, a broken heart, and all that variety of anguish of spirit which respects our salvation. In all these, and in many other cases, the kindness needed is not pecuniary bounty, but those good offices which are suited to the nature of the suffering. And the worth of beneficence to such as are in distress is universally acknowledged. Excellence in other forms is often doubted, denied, disrelished, and calumniated; in this it seems always to be respected."

But when sympathy with, and kindness to the poor and afflicted, are recommended as evidences and emanations of Christian love, many begin to fabricate vain pleas to excuse themselves. "I have no talent or

tact," says one, "for visiting and consoling the children of sorrow and want." To this it may be replied, if there be a feeling heart, small talent will suffice; and the tact in this, as in other things, can be acquired only by practice. Another protests he has neither time nor property to spare for such an employment. But might not a good system of economy so husband both these articles as to leave a fair proportion of them to be at the disposal of Christian charity? A third affects to have feelings so exquisitely tender as to be quite incapable of bearing any sight of wretchedness and distress. Odious pretence! This is nothing but selfishness, wrapt up and disguised in the veil of false or feigned delicacy.

Let it be remembered that God has connected our own happiness, both in this life and the next, with the exercise of a generous benevolence towards the needy and the wretched. "If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon-day. And the Lord shall guide thee con-

tinually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of waters, whose waters fail not." Isa. lviii. 10, 11. Not, indeed, that charity will either make us a paradise below, or purchase us a place in the paradise above; all such notions, and the self-elating vanity from which they grow, must be swept away with abhorrence. Yet it is true that God has established the connexion of means and ends, so that, in blessing others, we are ourselves blessed.

How will the excuses to which I have referred appear in the reckoning of the great day? When Christ shall say to those on his left hand, just before their dread sentence of condemnation falls from his lips, "I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat, thirsty, and ye gave me no drink, naked, and ye clothed me not, a stranger, and ye took me not in, sick and in prison, and ye visited me not; forasmuch as ye did it not to the least of these my brethren, ye did it not unto me."

· *A Prayer.*

“O Lord, I know not what I should ask of thee. Thou only knowest what I want, and thou lovest me better than I can love myself. I dare not ask either comforts or crosses. I only present myself before thee, and open my heart to thee. Smite or heal, depress me or raise me up; I adore all thy purposes without knowing them: I am silent, I offer myself in sacrifice *.” Lord God, thy mercy is equal to thy power and majesty. Like thy servant of old, I can say, “Thou hast lifted me up from the gates of death, and thou hast, in love to my soul, delivered it from the pit of destruction, and hast cast all my sins behind thy back. O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit.” I beseech thee, warm my heart with the sacred fires of love and gratitude to thee, and holy zeal for thy glory. And if I should experience no relapse, but recover my health and strength fully, let me never forget that I have solemnly devoted myself and all that I have unto thee.

* Fenelon.

My talents, time, property, and influence all come from thee, and to thy service I consecrate them. O God, preserve me from covetousness, which is idolatry; from selfishness and fleshly indulgence; from pride and ostentation; from sloth and negligence. Thou hast commanded us to do good unto all men, but especially to them who are of the household of faith. O give me ability and a heart to assist and relieve the poor and the necessitous, to visit the sick and afflicted, to warn the carnally secure, to comfort those who mourn in Zion, to counsel and encourage such as are in darkness and in perplexity. Ever would I live and walk in brotherly love with the disciples of Jesus, and be ready to rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. And the wicked and ungodly shall have a share in my compassions and supplications. O Lord, whilst I endeavour to obey thy commands, let me feed and live upon thy promises, and have grace to keep a conscience always void of offence, for the sake of Jesus, my only Advocate and Redeemer. Amen.

CHAPTER XII.

The Twelfth Use of Affliction.

To weaken our attachment to inferior objects and pursuits, and to familiarize our thoughts to the fall and dissolution of our clay tabernacles.

All real Christians are the subjects of a new birth, the children of God by adoption, and the heirs of a celestial kingdom; yet there are in them the roots and remains of sin. According to the language of our Lord, “they are not of the world;” for they belong to that community or church which is governed by laws and influenced by principles, which the carnal and unregenerate part of mankind can neither love nor understand. Still, as they are full of infirmity, and exposed to allurements and temptations in a thousand forms, they need have daily pressed upon them the apostolic exhortation, “Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right

hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." O exalted and unspeakable privilege! to have a part with Christ, and to have our best interests as safe as the perfections of God can make them! Such a manner of expression might have appeared unwarrantable, had we not received it from the pen of inspiration. But as are our privileges, such must be our duties. If our treasure be in heaven, no wonder we are required to have our hearts there. Terrestrial scenes are not to captivate and engage us because we shall soon leave them. In point of fact, the productions and delights of earth never fill and satisfy man's immortal part. To use the language of a profound divine, "they first tempt, then please a little, then disappoint, and lastly vex. The eye that beholds them blasts them quickly, rifles and deflowers their glory, and views them not with more delight at first than with disdain afterwards. Creature enjoyments have a bottom, are soon drained and drawn dry. Hence there

must be frequent diversions; other pleasures must be sought out, and are chosen, not because they are better, but because they are new. This demonstrates the emptiness and vanity of the creature. Affection of variety only proceeds from a sense of want, and is a confession upon trial that there is not in such an enjoyment of what was expected*."

I do not here touch on the connexions, pursuits, and pleasures which are expressly forbidden and criminal, because pious and good men shrink from them, and blush when they are named; but such as are in themselves innocent, and then only become hurtful when they unduly engage our hearts. The little quiet sphere of domestic life, and the somewhat wider circle which includes our intimate friends, offer scope enough for the discharge of many relative duties, and the exercise of all the Christian virtues and graces. It were folly akin to frenzy to abandon such facilities of warm social intercourse for the monk's cold cell and the hermit's barren desert. But even the ties

* Howe.

of domestic life and the bonds of friendship may straighten and ensnare our souls. Hence Paul, speaking to the Corinthian Church on the subject of marriage, saith, "But this I say, brethren, the time is short; it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep as though they wept not; and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy as though they possessed not; and they that use this world as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away." 1 Cor. vii. 29. There are many occupations and pursuits of business which are lawful, and, to a certain point, even commendable; but we are apt, when engaged in them, to launch out too far, to get burdened and embarrassed with secular cares, till our spiritual interests are forgotten. It is a painful contrast, yet very common, to see the agriculturist or farmer improving his land, while his mind is comparatively barren; the tradesman rising, and gaining stock and credit in trade, but declining in the best things, and losing his religious comfort. Alas!

how poor are the profits for which many incessantly labour, and bereave their souls of real good ! There is nothing permanent and abiding in them. But if God were to decree that riches should no longer have wings, nor pleasure be linked with pain, nor power be marked by the evil eye of envy, yet we ourselves are both mutable and mortal, and must soon leave our sublunary possessions, even if they do not leave us. Our life is in Scripture compared to a flower, a vapour, a shadow, a dream. The flower springs out of the earth, and is scarcely blown before its beauty is faded and gone ; the vapour floats in the air, and borrows a lovely lustre from the setting sun ; but while we gaze and admire, it dissolves and disappears ; the shadow of a driving cloud has outline and form, but it flies on the tempest's wings, and can neither be grasped by the hand nor retained in the eye ; the dream is made up of motley images, of joys and griefs, mixed in strange confusion, and quickly forgotten !

Many pleasures, which are in themselves

innocent and allowable, prove very injurious by excess. Among these are the pleasures of science, learning, and taste. I am sensible that I am treading on what may seem delicate, or even debatable ground. If my reader has been fond of studying nature, or has kindled into rapture amidst the charms of classical lore, he may be ready to exclaim, “What! lay a new interdict, worse than any that Popish Rome ever laid, on the researches of intellect! or lay another Gothic embargo on the rich products of imagination!” Far from me be the wish or the thought. But if what are termed the pleasures of knowledge and taste engross and absorb the mind, they become pernicious to the Christian.

Now he who knoweth our state and danger sends sickness, bereavement, and affliction to loosen our hearts, and wean us from *those things which perish in the using*, to whatever class or department they may belong. “Arise ye, and depart, for this is not your rest;” when this call is unheard or disregarded, he makes us to hear the voice of his rod. Without warning after

warning, and stroke upon stroke, we forget that we are only pilgrims here, who should be daily thinking of home and hastening towards it.

“Those who are invited to feast in a nobleman’s mansion may be charmed with the rich furniture and splendid entertainment, but they are only to remain a few hours, and when they depart, are allowed to carry nothing away. The world is God’s great house, richly furnished to entertain us; all things are for our present use, nothing at all is our own. And therefore God hath set the grim porter Death at the gate, to see that, as we brought nothing into it, so we may carry nothing out of it*.”

For Christians, who cordially believe the doctrine of immortality, to be fast glued to earth and its transient objects, is truly amazing. Yet, because this is not a rare, but a common case, it is seldom the matter of serious reflection. We are borne along by the stream of time with a silent but swift current, yet we doat upon the flowers

* Bishop Hopkins.

and plants which grow on its banks, though we are leaving them all behind us, and shall soon launch into that ocean where they can be seen no more. The little glow-worms, which throw out a tiny lustre by the side of our path, and even the masses of decay and rottenness that shine in our present night have a strange power of attraction; for we know that when the day breaks, their glimmer will be gone. Strong attachments to things precarious, and comparative indifference to durable riches and righteousness, are paradoxes which may well astound us, inconsistencies the most palpable and perplexing. On witnessing such incongruities, we might ask, where is faith? where is reason? where is probity, or her sister prudence? “If we had a certain prospect of a great estate and splendid mansion, which we knew must be ours in a few days, and not only ours as a bequest, but as an inheritance; not only as a possession, but a perpetuity; if, in the mean time, we rented on a precarious lease a paltry cottage in bad repair, ready to fall, and from which we knew we

must at all events soon be turned out, depending on the proprietor's will, whether the ejection might not be the next minute, would it argue wisdom, or even common sense, totally to overlook our near and noble reversion, and to be so fondly attached to our falling tenement as to spend great part of our time and thoughts in supporting its ruins by props, and concealing its decays by decorations? To be so absorbed in the little sordid pleasures of this frail abode as not even to cultivate a taste for the mansion where such treasures are laid up for us, and on the possession of which we fully reckon, in spite of our neglect; this is an excess of inconsideration which must be seen to be credited*."

God sends calamities and crosses to shake away the hollow rotten pillars on which we lean, and to loosen our grasp from those slender, treacherous twigs to which we eagerly cling. As the eagle stirs up her nest, and renders its thorny prickles painful to her young ones, that, urged by her, they may leave it, and trying their

* Mrs. More.

pinions begin to soar in their own element—so is our present lot made uneasy to us that we may be prepared to wing our flight into a higher and purer region. “We,” said Paul, “who are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon, with our house which is from heaven; yea,” adds he, “we are always confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.” “Vanish, ye terrestrial scenes! Fly away, ye vain objects of sense! My God, revealing his glories and his graces in Jesus Christ his Son, is sufficient for my eternal entertainment. What if all former ideas of visible things were wiped from my soul? What if I had no imagination, no memory, no traces left of anything, but the joys I have found in thy presence and the assurances of thy everlasting favour? Those are the only past moments I recall with pleasure; and oh! let all the vast eternity before me be spent in these satisfactions*!”

It will be readily admitted that there is

* Mrs. Rowe.

usually a strong reluctance, at all times and in all circumstances, to put off this coil of flesh. Nature shrinks and trembles at the very thought of the material frame being broken up and dissolved. Are any, then, found willing to die—hoping and calmly waiting for the event? How or whence is this? What cause has wrought the mighty change? Besides, the knowledge drawn only from the divine testimonies, that a better dwelling is prepared for the disembodied soul; besides the earnest and pledge of the Holy Spirit freely given to us, this effect must in part be ascribed to the salutary influence of those pains and burdens which frequently force a vent in sighs and groans. It has been remarked by Dr. Watts, “That bodily infirmities, like breaks in a wall, have often been avenues through which the light of heaven has entered to the soul and made the imprisoned inmate long for release.” Watts was the subject of much pain and weakness, which often confined him for weeks or months to his chamber; yet so happily was he resigned to the divine will,

and prepared for all events, that he used to say, "I bless God I can close my eyes in sleep, without being anxious whether I open them in this world or another!"

Have your afflictions detached you from creatures and drawn you nearer to God? Has the shaking of your frail tabernacle familiarised your mind to the thought and expectation of its fall? I have known some who, being fortified by Christian principles, felt no painful apprehension as to the consequences of death, and yet dreaded the shock itself, or the tedious passage through conflicts and struggles which leads to it. Even this fear, which is probably in great measure constitutional, has frequently been removed before the hour of dissolution approached. Mr. Toller, of Kettering, was at times subject to fits of depression, and he trembled, lest when he had done his Master's work, he should have long to linger in anguish at the threshold of home. It pleased God to scatter these alarms by means which his wisdom in Providence had appointed. About a year before his decease Mr. Toller was seized with apo-

plexity, and some time after he was repeatedly attacked in the same way. His fears vanished and his hopes brightened; and once, on recovering from a fit of this disorder, he said to his wife, "Well, if I had died, death would have been nothing; I should have felt no pain; I should never have known anything till I was in heaven; death would have been a translation."

But it may be, that your affliction has produced only a faint impression of death and eternity. Pray then with Moses, "Lord, so teach me to number my days, that I may apply my heart unto wisdom." You might ask, can it be necessary to seek instruction from heaven to acquaint us with a truth so plain as the brevity of human life? Did not the heathen sages of Greece and Rome finely illustrate and enforce it? Yes, and drew from it a motive to intemperance and licentiousness; for when they went with their garments perfumed and their heads crowned with rose-buds to splendid feasts, where the vicious of both sexes sat down, it was their favourite maxim, "Let us eat and drink, for to-

morrow we die." The act of numbering our days, so as profitably to improve them, and constantly to remember our latter end, is a lesson of divine philosophy which neither schools nor colleges can teach. It comes from that Being who has numberless ways of access to the human mind, and can give with clear and distinct ideas, deep and devout impressions. We look around us and see some of our fellow-creatures sinking gradually, and others swept off suddenly into the grave; we feel within our own frames the seeds of mortality; and though it is not for us to choose the time, the manner, and the circumstances of our departure hence, we can hardly be liable to any mistake in affirming that our maladies and pangs, our troubles both personal and relative, were intended to warn us of the solemn change to which we are approaching, and to wean us from everything which fades under the touch of time.

A Prayer.

O Lord, my God and my hope, thou hast chastened me, but not given me up to

death; yet the time will come, and may come very soon, when I shall go the way of all the earth. O teach me to know my end, and the measure of my days what it is, that I may know how frail I am! Alas! alas! my soul cleaveth to the dust, quicken thou me, that I may call upon thee, and rejoice in thy favour, which is far better than life. Why should I be captivated with those bubbles which glitter a moment, and then, bursting, disappear; or with those worthless toys which tantalize and deceive the children of this world? O my gracious and all-sufficient Helper, my hope, my happiness, my portion, this deathless spirit in me was not made for creatures, nor can they fill it. Neither the ties of affinity, nor the bonds of friendship, the pursuits of business, nor the pleasures of knowledge, are free from danger. Lord, draw my heart to thyself and make me willing to die, that I may be with Christ. Oh! let every blast that shakes this tenement of clay make me long for that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Assist me to form an intimate acquaintance with

death and the grave, and follow boldly the steps of my Lord, who conquered both, that his servants might come after him to gather the spoil. Oh! may I be separated in heart from the things of earth long before my soul is separated from the body of dust with which it is now mysteriously united. And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee. Give me grace and the good Spirit of holy love and liberty to guide me by thy counsel, and at last receive me to glory. Grant this, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our great Redeemer. Amen.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Thirteenth Use of Affliction.

To refine and sanctify us for the inheritance of the saints in light, and to render more and more sweet and cheering the promise and the prospect of that heavenly kingdom, where sickness and sorrow the bitter fruit, and sin the baneful root—where fear and vexation, danger and temptation, are known and felt no more.

If our existence were limited to the span of time allotted us on earth, an impenetrable darkness would involve the ways of Providence ; a gloom black as sackcloth would be spread over us. We might in a tone of despondency then ask, why are bad men so often crowned with success and prosperity and good men plunged in sorrow and adversity ? But Jesus Christ has brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel : a state of blessedness for the righteous and a state of misery for the

wicked, which shall never end, are disclosed in the volume of inspiration with the clearness of the noon-day sun.

Nor is this all ; for it is plainly asserted in Scripture, that the design of God in afflicting his people is to fit them for future happiness. The saints of the Old and New Testaments were sustained and encouraged under all their trials by this animating consideration. Job, who endured such accumulated and overwhelming sufferings, as to deem the arrows of the Almighty within him, could yet heroically exclaim, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. He knoweth the way that I take, when he hath tried me I shall come forth like gold." The refiner does not mean to destroy his precious metal by throwing it into the furnace ; no, but to purge away its dross, and form it into a vessel of honour, fitted for his own use and capable of reflecting his own image. The prophet said, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy ; when I fall I shall arise ; when I sit in darkness the Lord shall be a light unto me." *Micah* vii. 8. Paul and his fellow-labourers had

many and severe trials, but hear how he speaks of them:—"These light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Many of the heathen had a vague idea of some future state of being; but it was so blended with fables, so dim, confused, and uncertain, that it furnished a theme for conjecture and dispute, rather than a source of consolation. "Apart from the hope of the Gospel," says a living writer, "who is there that ruminates on the felicity of heaven? Even if the human mind were better qualified than it is to engage in meditations of this sort, and were more disposed than it is to dwell on such themes, the labour would want impulse, and would be idle and fruitless in its issue, unless connected in some distinct and satisfactory manner with a personal expectation of becoming a sharer in the future happiness.

Why do not men at large think of heaven? Why do not poets make immortal joy their constant theme? Alas! because neither men at large nor the most gifted minds discern the way thither as open to themselves*.” Those who are the subjects of regenerating grace possess a lively hope of the inheritance which is incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.” Our Lord said to his disciples, “Fear not, little flock, it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Oh! rich, free, boundless grace. how are we lost in wonder when we seriously and sedately muse upon it! A kingdom promised to us, who, as rebels, deserved to be banished into outer darkness and endless woe!—it seems almost too much to realize. How sweet is the promise of rest and peace when we are racked with pain and anguish!—of joy and delight when we are plunged in the depths of sorrow! The prospect of our heavenly inheritance renders our jour-

* “Saturday Evening.”

ney less toilsome, and we well might forget the thorns and briers, the pitfalls, perils, and privations of the way, by anticipating the happy end to which it leads. "I reckon," saith the apostle, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." But was not this ardent and aspiring candidate for immortal life too sanguine and ecstatic? Did he not reckon rashly and overrate the felicity of the future world? No, no; he who had been caught up to the third heaven, and had received an abundance of revelations there, was not likely to err in his calculation. Indeed, Christian experience to this hour can set a seal to those testimonies which the world treats with scorn or silent neglect. The sorrows of mortality heighten the value and sweeten the relish of the promise which holds out to us an everlasting kingdom. And when the prospect thus presented is steadily viewed by an eye of faith, the pains and fears of nature almost lose their power to affect us. This might be proved by an appeal to well-attested

facts. The noble army of martyrs, being dead, yet speak to us on this point ; but it will serve my purpose to introduce an instance or two from more recent times. The excellent Halyburton, a short time before his death, broke out into the following remarkable language :—

“O Sirs, I could not have believed that I should bear, and bear cheerfully, as I have done, this rod which hath lain on me so long. This is a miracle : pain without pain ; and this is not the fancy of a man disordered, but of one who is fully composed. O blessed be God that ever I was born. I have a father and mother, and ten brethren and sisters in heaven, and I shall be the eleventh. O, blessed be the day that ever I was born ! O that I were where he is ! And yet were God to withdraw from me I should be weak as water. All that I enjoy, though it be miracle on miracle, would not support me without fresh supplies from God.”

The venerable Dr. Simpson, my honoured and beloved tutor, in his last illness had excruciating pains to bear, yet his for-

titude remained unshaken : yes, his corporeal sufferings were often absorbed and annihilated in the raptures and anticipations of his spirit. At one time, when several of his family were in the room, he said, “Oh ! that I had strength to speak what I feel ! My body, it is true, is tormented beyond measure ; but the joy of my soul is transporting ; my prospects are pleasing in the extreme. Oh ! what must it be to dwell with Jesus in heaven—to behold his inexpressible glories, to feast on his love ! If faith can see and enjoy so much, what must the beatific vision be ! Why the very prospect of this is enough for all the pains, the groans, the dying strife of frail mortality.”

Has your affliction had the effect of raising your grovelling thoughts and of refining your gross affections ? Say, do you look more intently to the happiness of heaven, and to the holiness which alone can prepare you to enjoy it ? “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” The fulness and perfection of future felicity will be the sight of the divine

glory unveiled; yet none but regenerate souls are fitted for this transporting vision. For in a state of nature we all are as an unclean thing, and even our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Is. lxiv. 6. The work of sanctification is commenced and carried on in the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit; yet while such a sacred and supernatural agency is confessedly in operation various means are used—and, among the rest, painful dispensations of Providence. "We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby." Heb. xii. 9-11. Where shall we find so interesting a view of the purposes of a wise and gracious God in afflicting his children as is here exhi-

bited? And be the solemn declaration never forgotten, never thrown into the background, "That without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Where this essential requisite is wanting, bright gifts, and a blazing profession will only aggravate the dread reckoning of a future day. Christianity is a religion of purity, bearing enstamped upon it the character of its Divine Author. Its principles are all pure and sublime; its precepts are all pure and practical. We are exhorted "to give diligence to make our calling and election sure; because if we do these things, we shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." 2 Pet. i. 10. And what do the inspired writers mean by the kingdom prepared for the saints? The terms unquestionably convey ideas of exalted dignity and honour, of unfailing plenty, peace, and joy. But alas! our descriptions of the unseen and eternal world are at best faint and indistinct, and exceedingly defective. And no marvel, when we are told "that eye hath

not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." On this subject the sacred writers speak with a modest reserve; they tell us rather what things are not in heaven than what are there. Our future will form a contrast with our present lot and mortal life. In that fair kingdom no sickness and sorrow will be found. Sighs and groans shall never breathe their doleful sounds through the air, nor floods of briny tears flow from the eyes to moisten the ground. Sickness and sorrow are the bitter fruits of sin; but in heaven neither the baneful root nor the prolific branches, nor any of the deadly fruit can ever find a place. Christians, sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, there remaineth a rest for you, and as soon as you quit the wilderness, and set foot in the land of promise, the days of your mourning shall be ended. Never shall you faint under the sultry heat of summer, nor feel the winter's cold blast, nor tremble at the howl of wild beasts and the hiss of fiery serpents. The plunderers and the

plagues to which you were exposed in the desert shall assault you no more, for the days of your mourning shall be ended!

Is it so? Why, then, are we so tied and bound to earth, and so wedded to dust? Is there any thing here which deserves our hearts? Shall we be always children, enamoured with baubles? Shall we act like men bereft of reason, and under the power of a strange infatuation? “O! how hath our corruption bewitched us, to thirst for wormwood, to affect the shipwrecks of this world, to doat upon the misery of this fading life; and not rather to fly up to the felicity of saints, to the society of angels, to that blessed contemplation wherein we shall see God in himself, God in us, ourselves in him! There shall be no sorrow, no pain, no complaint, no fear, no death. There is no malice to rise against us, no misery to afflict us, no hunger, thirst, weariness, or temptation to disquiet us. There, O there, one day is better than a thousand! there is rest from our labours, peace from our enemies, freedom from our sins! How many clouds of

discontent darken the sunshine of our joy while we are here below? Complaint of evils past, sense of present, fear of future, have shared our lives among them. Then shall we be always joyful, always satisfied with the vision of that God in whose presence there is fulness of joy*.”

Have you been much tossed on the stormy billows of life? Have you at one time trembled lest you should be swamped in the deep waters, and at another lest you should be wrecked on the secret treacherous shoals of the coast? Has the very anchor of hope been scarcely able to save you from the rocks of presumption or the whirlpools of despair? How desirable to enter that fair haven of safety and rest where tempests never rise, where tumultuous waters never swell! The perils of the ocean escaped, and the port of peace gained, it will be delightful to review and relate the incidents and hardships of the voyage, giving praise to your invisible Preserver. Have you been the subject of great bodily affliction? Sometimes worn on the rough edge

* Bishop Hall.

of pain to the last degree of possible endurance; at other times sunk to infantine debility and weakness, with a weight and pressure on the spirits too heavy to be borne? O how refreshing and pleasant to think of rising to the paradise where sin and death never yet found access, never shall find the least avenue of approach, to breathe around a fatal pestilence to taint the purity, or wither the bloom of that blissful region! Have you been harassed by the subtle stratagems or fiery darts of the infernal enemy? What Christian has not to meet in combat this prince of darkness and his horrid legions? Remember, it is written, "The Lord shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly; that great dragon shall be thoroughly subdued." Oh! the glorious triumph of gaining a complete victory over all the powers and principalities of hell! Have you found a conflict with your own fleshly lusts, and a law in your members warring against the law of your mind? had frequent cause to complain of vain thoughts, of towering imaginations, of inward revolts and heart-idola-

tries? O the transport of knowing by experience that these foes within the walls, these bosom traitors, these bitter disturbers and destroyers of our peace are completely cast out for ever! When we view heaven as an exemption from the evils with which we are now tried, no wonder that pious men have often desired to die. One on the point of departure said, “ I now come to the Lord as a vile sinner, trusting in the merits and precious blood of my dear Redeemer. O grace, grace, free grace! I am going from weeping friends to congratulating angels and rejoicing saints in glory! O how astonishingly is the Lord softening my passage, surely God is too good to such a worm. O speed thy chariot-wheels! why are they so long in coming? I long to be gone*.”

In that kingdom to which Christians look in faith and hope, “ there shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their fore-

* Risdon Darracot.

heads, and there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever."

Though we have dwelt chiefly on negatives, yet, from the words just recited, it is manifest that there are positive enjoyments in heaven, which we cannot contemplate without desiring. The presence of God and of Christ our Saviour is the crown and consummation of celestial bliss. The mind cannot conceive of any thing higher and better. To have immediate access to the eternal King of kings might seem an elevation beyond the hope of such feeble and fallen creatures as we are! To receive those emanations of light and love which in heaven are perpetually streaming down upon redeemed souls from him who is the fountain of wisdom, goodness, purity, and joy, is a happiness which we must possess to estimate aright. Methinks I see myriads of angels worshipping God in his temple day and night, all glowing under the smiles

of his countenance, all drinking in sweet delight from his benignity and love! But with still deeper interest and delight I behold the spirits of just men made perfect. Oh! how exalted their state! how pure and refined their felicity!

Let us faithfully bring the question home. Are we heirs of that heavenly kingdom? Have we passed from death unto life, possessing the witness of the Spirit to our adoption? O, then, we may look to heaven as our home. Some of those whom we knew and loved on earth are gone before us, and entered the joy of their Lord. O! how delightful to join them in our Father's house above! how inexpressibly delightful to meet there the righteous of every age and every nation—the patriarchs and prophets, the glorious company of the apostles, and the noble army of martyrs and confessors. The sweet anticipation soothes our present pilgrimage, and supports us in the near approach of dissolution.

A Prayer.

O Thou, who art the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who art wonderful in counsel and excellent in working, give me to understand more of the mysteries both of thy providence and thy grace. From the furnace of affliction bring me forth as silver and gold separated from dross and alloy, and stamped with thy likeness and superscription, in a manner so plain as to be read and known of all. Our earthly parents have often chastened us for their own pleasure, but thou dost always chasten thy children for their profit. Thou lovest them too well to leave them altogether uncorrected. O Lord, remove my errors, and idols, and iniquities, and make me a sharer in thy love and a partaker of thy holiness ! O come, come ! cleanse and renew this corrupt heart, this hidden fountain of evil, that my rising thoughts and habitual motives, that the stream of my words and the current of my conduct may henceforth be pure and salutary.

Thou seest that my soul followeth hard after thee ! I desire to know thee more fully, to love thee more fervently, to serve thee more diligently, to feel more conscious enlargement in thy presenee, and find more saered and sublime delight in thy favour. Blessed be thy name, my God and my King, for the free promise of eternal life through Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant. This is the essence of the precious Gospel with which I have been favoured. May the sufferings of the present state make the promise of everlasting life more and more sweet ; and let my prospect of future glory grow more clear and bright, till not a eloud of doubt and uncertainty remain ! While the tabernaele of flesh is giving daily signs of weakness and deeay, O may I know that there are many mansions in my Father's house above, and that a place there is reserved for me. Multitudes of happy spirits, once sojourners in this wilderness, are now bathing in the river of life and breathing the spirit of perfect love ! O may I join the redeemed in those blissful mansions, where I shall neither feel nor

fear the evils that now beset me. No root of bitterness, no rankling care, no secret perils, or subtle temptations shall there trouble my spirit. And why is my faith so weak and wavering? Why are my affections, in regard to spiritual things, so lukewarm and dull? Is not the glorious kingdom prepared for the followers of the Lamb? O, how I feel ashamed of my remaining corruption and carnality, my chains of sin and clods of dust! Lord of life and glory, shine into my soul; show me thy mercy and grant me thy salvation; separate me from vanity and sin, and make me meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. O, may I long for the joys and pleasures which are at thy right hand, and yet wait with patience and resignation all the days of my appointed time here. Indulgent Father, let thy good Spirit conduct my trembling steps when I pass through the valley of the shadow of death; and having entered into that better country, which is the object of my hope and desire, I shall mingle with thy chosen and redeemed people and join their rap-

ture-kindling song—"Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

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